

Activity Agreement Pilots

Evaluation of the 2008-2009 Extension

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Summary

The 2005 Budget announced the piloting of a new initiative aimed at extending participation in education and training among young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Activity Agreements (AA) pilots were launched for a two-year period to support and encourage disengaged 16-17 year olds back into learning, training or employment. Young people (and in some areas, parents) were offered a weekly allowance in return for agreeing to a plan and completing activities to integrate them back into learning. A number of variants of AA were piloted, with a view to identifying the most successful models.

The first extended period of trialling the Activity Agreement Pilots began in April 2008 (Pilot 2) and was accompanied by a number of changes to the delivery of the initiative. These changes to local implementation were designed to increase take-up rates, among young people who are defined as NEET, as well as to test and develop approaches to support a raised participation age. There were also changes made to the variants which operated in the pilot areas. This included three new elements of the AA being tested, which were:

Model 1: 13 and 20 weeks AAs

This was a direct extension of the pilots which tested an earlier intervention at 13 weeks NEET, whilst continuing to offer AAs to 20+ weeks NEET young people. Whilst participating in an AA, young people received £30 each week (subject to completion of agreed activities) for a maximum of 20 weeks.

Model 2: EMA drop-out AAs

This model allowed young people who had previously been in receipt of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) immediately prior to their referral to Connexions, to enter an AA six weeks after leaving their course or training programme. Following notification of 'drop out' by their learning provider, follow-up contact was made by Connexions. A young person could start an AA if they had not secured a future start date in education, employment or training (EET) by week 5 and if no more than eight weeks had elapsed since notification of their drop-out had been received.

Model 3: Vulnerable groups AAs

This model allowed particularly vulnerable young people to be fast-tracked onto an AA. Initial assessment and advice was completed by Connexions. Young people who were classified as belonging to a vulnerable group started an AA after a six-week eligibility period and received £30 each week unless they were claiming some types of benefits, for a maximum period of 20 weeks. Vulnerable groups were defined as young people from a number of different categories including carers, the homeless, young offenders and young people with learning difficulties/disabilities (LDDs).

Research approach

The research consisted of four elements: interpretation of management information and feedback from pilot managers, implementation studies which provided a more detailed, longitudinal and qualitative account of the perspectives of different stakeholders involved in the delivery of AA, and case studies in three localities and a cohort analysis.

Key findings

- Overall, 8,267 young people started on the AA in its extension year, compared to a profile of 8,726.
- The changes which were introduced were broadly welcomed, since they had 'opened out' the potential for engaging with a greater volume of young people who were NEET and, in many cases, offered earlier intervention.
- The majority of respondents felt that accessing young people at 13 weeks with the AA offer was easier (**Model 1a**) compared to Pilot 1, where entry to the programme occurred after spending 20+ weeks NEET, since many young people were still in contact with the Connexions Service. In addition, many of them were 'not entrenched in inactivity' and were easier to motivate and to encourage both to join the programme and to progress. Over half of participants achieved a positive outcome immediately following their completion of the programme.
- **Model 2** had been the most difficult part of the AA extension phase to implement, since it had required Connexions Services to develop and introduce *new* systems, in order to engage both with referral agencies and directly with a new group of young people. The main areas for concern surrounded: *accessing data, establishing referral systems, applying the eligibility criteria and retaining EMA financial assessment criteria within AA delivery*. The one-year extension period was not considered long enough to operationalise an AA model targeted specifically at early drop-outs from post-16 learning.
- The introduction of **Model 3** provided the opportunity for AA staff to work with young people with complex needs at a much earlier stage. It was widely reported that this earlier intervention and work with vulnerable groups of young people was both resource intensive and demanding for Connexions staff.
- The introduction of **four AA entry points** (Models 1a, 1b, 2 and 3) was a difficult message to convey, particularly in areas which were operating a number of different models. While publicity material was changed to reflect the introduction of the new models, pilot managers and AA operational staff relied far more heavily on referrals from Connexions PAs and external agencies which worked with young people during Pilot 2.
- In pilot areas where the weekly **AA financial allowance was raised to £30 per week** as part of Pilot 2 arrangements, the increase was welcomed. It also equated to the maximum EMA entitlement, which was a well-known 'brand' and young people recognised the allowance as being an entitlement they might be able to continue to claim, if they moved on to education and training.
- The importance of **measuring soft outcomes from AA** was considered to be a crucial measure of success from AA, in particular among young people from vulnerable groups, where immediate progression to education and training could be an unrealistic expectation, given the barriers to engagement, which needed to be overcome.

Management and staffing structures

The introduction, during the extension period, of the multiple entry points to AA had extended the AA eligible population and, in many instances, had increased caseload sizes among operational staff. Increasingly, pilot areas moved towards tiered staffing arrangements, which involved PAs, or equivalent grades of staffing, concentrating their efforts on engaging and supporting young people and less qualified staff managing tasks such as the brokering of AA provision and dealing with the administration of, for example, transport arrangements and payment queries.

There was a concern about the future delivery of AA within individual Local Authority (LA) control, in that if the AA formed part of mainstream delivery, sufficient care would need to be taken to ensure that it retained the effective elements of the programme. For example, in LA areas where it was reported that AAs 'fitted comfortably' within the local NEET strategy, it was felt that the programme might 'get lost' within a raft of other local policy initiatives.

Engagement with local stakeholders

The introduction of Model 3 (vulnerable groups) had enabled AA managerial and operational staff to extend their links with other statutory and voluntary agencies. There was evidence that AA staff were working more closely with other agencies both to identify young people who were eligible for AA and to develop suitable and appropriate AA provision to meet specific needs.

Provision

Private and voluntary sector training providers were reported to be largely much more flexible and amenable to the requirements of the AA programme, although there were examples of good practice in some colleges. However, despite extended links with a range of providers, there often remained a disparity between young people's needs in terms of provision and local availability.

During pilot 2, some pilot areas had placed an increased emphasis on securing AA provision which offered some form of accreditation. While the opportunity to offer accredited provision was broadly welcomed, some concern was expressed about the risk of losing the personalised learner journey that was the cornerstone of the AA offer, in a quest to achieve qualification outcomes as quickly as possible.

The views of providers and support services

Education and training providers were positive about AAs as a strategy to address the needs of young people in the NEET group, although there was limited detailed understanding among them about the introduction of the new delivery models. In some pilot areas, the introduction of Model 3 had facilitated closer links between the Youth Offending Service (YOS) and Connexions, as YOS workers could make more immediate referrals to AA. Prior to the introduction of Model 3, the 20-week eligibility criteria had created a barrier for entry onto the programme among young offenders who required more immediate interventions.

Young people's views

The qualitative analysis of interviews with young people suggested that the AA was an effective tool for re-engaging young people. It supported young people, offered them choices and development and they recognised their confidence and motivation had increased. Where positive outcomes were achieved, young people were able to identify the contribution of the AA. The adviser-broker support was a crucial element, especially for the most vulnerable young people, but it worked in conjunction with the incentive (to validate participation) and activities (to challenge, reward and develop young people).

Conclusions and implications for the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA)

- At the early stages of the extension pilot, the existence of a **number of different entry points** onto the programme, with variations between when young people could access the programme, depending on their NEET classification, made it more difficult for some Connexions staff, local stakeholders and young people to understand the AA eligibility criteria. This is a key finding, in terms of designing a programme for national implementation.
- It was widely asserted that AA is now a **well-known and established programme** in most localities.
- **Earlier intervention** was successful in achieving positive outcomes among young people without complex needs.
- Model 2 showed that input is needed to support **post-16 early leavers**, although current systems are not sufficiently functional to identify and support the population.
- **Vulnerable groups** cannot be classified as a homogeneous population, as they comprise a number of sub-groups, which often have differing needs.
- By concentrating AA delivery on the most vulnerable groups, there would be a risk that the **'silent and hidden majority'** within the NEET group would be left within mainstream services. This group are still mostly living at home and are, in the majority of cases, neither entitled to benefits nor classified as vulnerable. The highest proportion of EET outcomes was achieved within AA delivery for this group, often with early and short-term intervention.
- While the piloting of AA had 'led the way' in terms of developing new ways to access and deliver provision which offered a much greater focus on meeting the needs of individual learners, there is still a long way to go. **The existing standard post-16 offer will not meet the needs of the whole population of learners**, post 2013, nor will all young people be willing to participate and succeed within existing mainstream education and training provision.
- Vulnerable groups achieved the lowest proportion of **EET outcomes**, which questions the validity of continuing to use a **hard outcome measure** to demonstrate the success or otherwise of the AA pilot. The lack of emphasis placed on **soft outcomes** achieved within AA was widely criticised, given the nature of the client group to which AA was targeted. It was felt that AA was successful in pioneering personal development opportunities (PDOs) and sustained contact with support services, which provided the groundwork for future progression and that these achievements were largely overlooked. Moreover, it could be argued that by placing an increasing emphasis on offering accreditation within AA activities and improving EET outcomes within Pilot 2 and 3 delivery, this ran the risk of pushing AA towards a standard delivery model which the pilot had been set up to avoid.

1 INTRODUCTION

Young people who are 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) were brought firmly within the political agenda in 1999 with the publication of the Social Exclusion Unit's (SEU) report 'Bridging the Gap' (SEU, 1999). The SEU report drew attention to a growing body of evidence about the experiences and barriers that some groups of young people face. In recent years, a number of policy interventions have aimed to address social exclusion and disadvantage among young people, as well as to further support young people's transitions into education, training or employment.

The 2005 Budget announced the piloting of two new initiatives aimed at extending participation in education and training among young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and young people who are in jobs without training (JWT). Activity Agreements (AA) pilots were launched for a two-year period to support and encourage disengaged 16-17 year olds back into learning. In addition, Learning Agreement Pilots (LAP) were introduced for 16-17 year olds in work with no training to increase access to training options for this group. Activity Agreements and Learning Agreements were piloted in 12 areas of England from April 2006 for a two-year period. Young people (and in some areas, parents) were offered a weekly allowance in return for agreeing to a plan and completing activities to integrate them back into learning, employment and/or training. In addition, in some pilot areas, young people received bonus payments in recognition of their achievements, and financial incentives were paid to employers in some LAP areas. A number of variants of AA and LAP were piloted, with a view to identifying the most successful models.

The Activity Allowance was payable for a period of up to 20 weeks to 16 and 17 year olds who had been continuously NEET for 20 weeks or more. In addition to the allowance, a personally negotiated contract (the Agreement), which outlines specific steps the young person should take to move into education, training or employment in return for access to financial support, is developed between a Connexions Personal Adviser (PA) and the young person. Young people received continuous support from their Connexions PA throughout the process. As part of the Activity Agreement, a flexible programme of personally tailored activities for the young person was agreed between the PA and the young person. These activities could be part-time or bite-sized courses, part of mainstream provision or commissioned through the Connexions Partnership and may have included basic skills provision, vocational taster courses or personal development courses, as well as bespoke activities.

The Evaluation

The evaluation of the first two years of the piloting of AA was concluded in 2009 and a number of research reports have been published:

- Maguire, S., Thompson, J., Hillage, J., Dewson, S., Miller, L., Johnson, C., Newton, B., Bates, P. and Page, R. (2009) *Activity Agreement Pilots Process Evaluation* DCSF-RR095
- Tanner, E., Purdon, S., D'Souza, J. and Finch, S. (2009) *Activity Agreement Pilots Quantitative Evaluation* DCSF-RR096
- Newton, B., Levesley, T., Oakley, J., Fearn, H. and Johnson, C. (2009) *Activity and Learning Agreement Pilots Programme Theory Evaluation; Activity Agreements and Small Step Progression* Working Paper 5 DCSF-RR098

- Newton, B., Johnson, C. and Fearn, H. (2009) *Participation in Activity Agreement Provision; Activity and Learning Agreement Pilots Programme Theory Evaluation* Working Paper 3 DCSF-RR097
- Hillage, J., Johnson C., Newton, B., Maguire, S., Tanner, E. and Purdon, S. (2008) *Activity Agreements Synthesis Report* DCSF-RR063
- Maguire, S., Thompson, J., Hillage, J., Dewson, S., Miller, L., Johnson, C., Newton, B., Bates, P. and Page, R. (2008) *Evaluation of the Activity Agreement and Learning Pilots Process Evaluation: Year One Report* DCSF-RR027
- Johnson, C., Newton, B., Usher, T. and Hillage, J. (2008) *Incentivising Participation in Activity Agreements; Activity and Learning Agreement Pilots Programme Theory Evaluation* Working Paper 1 DCSF-RR028

1.1 Extension to the Activity Agreement Pilots

In the 2007 Budget, the Chancellor announced that both the AA and LAP would be extended into 2008/9. Table 1.1 sets out the pilot areas and the variants which were piloted for both AA between 2006 and 2008 (Pilot 1) and during 2008/9 (Pilot 2). This report concentrates on the implementation and delivery of the AA pilots during their extension period from April 2008 to April 2009.

The extended period of trialling the Activity Agreement Pilots began in April 2008 and was accompanied by a number of changes to the delivery of the initiative. These changes to local implementation were designed to increase take-up rates, in particular, among young people who are defined as NEET, as well as to test and develop approaches to support a raised participation age.

The objectives of the pilots in the extension phase were:

- to test the effectiveness of the Activity Agreements as a tool for re-engaging young people now and within the context of Raising the Participation Age (RPA), in particular in relation to those dropping out of learning

Table 1.1 - Pilot areas for the Activity Agreement extension evaluation

AA area	Pilot 1 AA variant	Models operated in Pilot 2
Cornwall and Devon	Variant 2 £30 per week to YP	Model 1, 2 and 3
Greater Manchester	Variant 3 £20 per week to YP and £30 per week to family	Model 1 and 3
London East	Variant 3 £20 per week to YP and £30 per week to family	Model 1, 2 and 3
West Yorkshire	Variant 1 £20 per week to YP	Model 1 and 3
Greater Merseyside	Variant 2 £30 per week to YP	Model 1, 2 and 3
Tyne and Wear	Variant 1 £20 per week to YP	Model 1, 2 and 3
Central London	Variant 2 £30 per week to YP	Model 1 and 3
Kent and Medway	Variant 1 £20 per week to YP	Model 1

Source: DCSF Guidance for the AA

- to monitor and understand how the extension is managed and implemented in different areas and to highlight good practice and any problems in the process with a view to inform the current NEET / JWT situation and RPA
- to understand what works (or does not work) within the extension: to understand how young people respond to agreements and brokerage and to understand for whom, in what circumstances, and in what respect the intervention has worked for the 'stock' of NEET and to inform how the approach would work under RPA.

From April 2008, there were also changes made to the variants which operated in the pilot areas. This included three new elements of the AA being tested, which were:

Model 1: 13 and 20 weeks AAs

This was a direct extension of the pilots which tested an earlier intervention at 13 weeks NEET, whilst continuing to offer AAs to 20+ weeks NEET young people. Whilst participating in an AA, young people received £30 each week (subject to completion of agreed activities) for a maximum of 20 weeks.

Model 2: EMA drop-out AAs

This model allowed young people who had previously been in receipt of EMA immediately prior to their referral to Connexions, to enter an AA six weeks after leaving their course or training programme. Following notification of 'drop out' by their learning provider, follow-up contact was made by Connexions. A young person could start an AA if they had not secured a future start date in EET by week 5 and if no more than eight weeks had elapsed since notification of their drop-out had been received.

Model 3: Vulnerable groups AAs

This model allowed particularly vulnerable young people to be fast-tracked onto an AA. Initial assessment and advice was completed by Connexions. Young people who were classified as belonging to a vulnerable group started an AA after a six-week eligibility period. Vulnerable groups were defined as young people from the following categories:

- Carers (own child or other person)
- Gypsy, Roma or Traveller
- Homeless (rough sleepers; living in women's refuges, hostels, friends / relatives floors)
- Refugees or asylum seekers who have been granted Refugee Status, Indefinite Leave to Remain, or Humanitarian Protection;
- Substance misusers
- Supervised by the Youth Offending Service (YOS)
- Young people with learning difficulties / disabilities.

Where payment of an AA allowance would interfere with benefit payments such as Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA), young people could participate on the programme on an agreement only basis. Young people on agreement only AA could make up no more than 10 per cent of entrants.

1.2 Methodology

This report is based on an evaluation of the implementation and delivery of the AA pilots during the extension period 2008 to 2009. The research consisted of four elements:

Interpretation of Management Information and feedback from pilot project managers

There were regular reports to DCSF based on aggregate data from the AA Management Information System supplied by DCSF and monthly feedback telephone discussions with every pilot project manager. Feedback discussions involved a review of the area data return and a gathering of information from pilot project managers about their perceptions and understanding of the new delivery models and associated emerging issues. In total, six feedback reports were produced across the course of the evaluation.

Implementation studies

The implementation studies provided a more detailed, longitudinal and qualitative account of the perspectives of different stakeholders involved in the delivery of AA. Two roundtable discussions with Connexions advisers and managers who were involved in the delivery of the AA across the lifetime of the pilot were conducted. In addition, between three and six stakeholders (depending on the size and complexity of each pilot) were interviewed in each pilot area, using a combination of face-to-face and telephone interviews. The stakeholders group varied in each area but typically included local Connexions managers as well as representatives from Jobcentre Plus, the Voluntary and Community sector, Local Authorities and Children's Trusts. In total, 36 interviews were completed.

Case studies

The case studies built on the strategic overview provided by the implementation studies and focused on the delivery of one model of AA within one local authority area, in three pilot areas. The case study approach provided a deeper level of understanding about the operation of the pilots in localities (within pilot areas) in order to build upon the strategic overview captured during the implementation studies. The purpose of completing intensive case studies was to 'drill down' to local area level, which enabled the research team to capture evidence in much more detail.

As part of the case studies, face-to-face interviews were conducted with young people participating in AA in each case study area (58 in total). Initial interviews were carried out in Autumn/Winter 2008. Each young person was asked if they would be willing to take part in a follow-up interview in order to track their destinations after the completion of their AA. In total, 35 follow-up interviews were achieved in Spring 2009.

The case studies also included 35 interviews with managers, providers and delivery staff.

Cohort analysis

The cohort analysis was a data assessment based on output from the Client Caseload Information System (CCIS) used by Pilots to track individuals on the AA. Pilot managers in two pilot areas were asked to arrange for a sample to be drawn from CCIS which included all young people who joined the AA in a specific week, and a control group¹ of non-joiners. Characteristics of these two groups were provided such as age, gender and ethnicity. All were NEET at the time the sample was drawn. The NEET/EET status of both groups was then tracked at monthly intervals to assess whether AA participation led to differential outcomes for young people.

1.3 Outputs from the evaluation

During the course of the evaluation period, three working papers were produced by the research team for DCSF. The purpose of the working papers was to provide rapid feedback on emerging issues from the evaluation. They included the following:

- *Working with the new Activity Agreement Delivery Models*, which presented headline findings from the first roundtable discussions which were completed in July/August 2008.
- *Wider impacts of the new Activity Agreement Delivery Models: the local stakeholders' perspective*, which provided feedback from interviews with a range of local stakeholders that were undertaken between July and September 2008.
- *Signing up to an Activity Agreement: views from young people*. This working paper presented a preliminary analysis of data from first interviews with young people from one of the three case study areas.

¹ Due to inconsistencies in recording information about contact and AA offers being made, the control group consisted of young people who had rejected the AA, as well as young people who appeared as if they would have been eligible to join it.

1.4 Report structure

The next section of this report describes the management of the AA pilots. Chapter 3 then looks at the delivery of AA. Chapter 4 explores what young people think of AA. Chapter 5 examines the effectiveness of AA and the implications for RPA. Finally, Chapter 6 presents the conclusions emerging from the research. The cohort analysis and case study evidence are presented as Appendices, although findings from the data are amalgamated into the main body of the report.

2 MANAGEMENT OF THE AA PILOTS

This chapter considers the effects of the changes that were made to the AA eligibility criteria on the management and operation of the AA pilots. It also reports on how pilot areas linked with local stakeholders and managed AA provision. The chapter concludes with an analysis of management information, which was collated during the AA extension period (2008/9).

2.1 The effects of the new delivery models

The changes which were introduced in April 2008 to the AA eligibility criteria were broadly welcomed, since they had 'opened out' the potential for engaging with a greater volume of young people who were NEET and, in many cases, offered earlier intervention. The following discussion focuses on the changes which had been made to AA payments to young people, and on the withdrawal of the payment to parents, which had operated in two pilot areas.

2.1.1 Model 1

Model 1, which allowed young people to participate in AAs at 13 weeks NEET, as well as the existing 20-week entry point, had significantly extended the eligible population and improved take-up rates. The majority of respondents felt that accessing young people at 13 weeks with the AA offer was easier (Model 1a), as many young people were still in contact with the Connexions Service. In addition, many of them were 'not entrenched in inactivity' and were easier to motivate and to encourage both to join the programme and to progress. However, in one pilot area, there was a strength of feeling that some young people at 13 weeks NEET were more difficult to motivate, particularly over the summer period, as they had considered their NEET status to be 'a break' from EET, rather than as a long-term situation.

2.1.2 Model 2

This model, which operated in three pilot areas, allowed EMA recipients who had completed or dropped out of full-time learning to enter AA after a six-week eligibility period. This model had been the most difficult part of the AA extension phase to implement, since it had required Connexions Services to develop and introduce *new* systems, in order to engage both with referral agencies and directly with a new group of young people. Model 2 areas had anticipated that there would be delivery issues, and this proved to be the case in the majority of localities. In one pilot area, Model 2 delivery was concentrated within only one of the five local authorities in the area, in order to meet implementation issues. The main areas for concern were:

- *Accessing data* - there were difficulties in securing accurate and timely data from post-16 learning providers, in particular from colleges. Some areas reported that Model 2 had been difficult to implement, since many young people who drop out of learning remained 'hidden' within destinations data.
- *Referral systems* - most pilot areas had built upon and extended their contacts with local schools and colleges, in order to develop referral systems. Such systems had also been established between school/college based PAs and AA operational staff. The introduction, in January 2009, of the statutory requirement for EET providers to notify Connexions Services about early leavers from their programmes, had little impact on the operation of Model 2.
- *Eligibility criteria* - the Model 2 eligibility criteria were restrictive, since PAs had only a three-week window in which to get a young person (YP) signed up. The window of opportunity to sign up young people between weeks 6 and 8 of leaving their course was missed on a number of occasions because the information was not available quickly enough.

- *Payment rates* - retaining EMA payment rates within AA delivery was viewed as cumbersome. In some cases, household income had changed since the EMA assessment was made, and this disadvantaged some young people entering AA through Model 2. In one area, it was reported that widespread delays in making initial EMA assessments had resulted in some young people not having the relevant paperwork to prove their EMA entitlement, since it had not been returned by the national payment provider. Making differential payments through AA was also more difficult to administer at a local level. An often complex differential payment system and delayed access to the Discretionary Fund, which is delivered through Model 2, encouraged some AA delivery staff to offer young people Model 1 as an alternative entry point to AA, despite a longer eligibility period.
- *Extension period* - the one-year extension period was not considered long enough to operationalise an AA model targeted specifically at early drop-outs from post-16 learning.

'... when the PA has met the young person when they think they have left (college), and the college sometimes might extend the date when the young person has left, so it was quite difficult to gauge from the information we had when the young person had actually left to get that three week slot If we based it all on the college data, by the time we spoke to the young people it would be too late.'

Connexions Personal Adviser

2.1.3 Model 3

This model allowed vulnerable groups of NEET young people to be fast-tracked onto an AA, after a six-week eligibility period. Young people in receipt of Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) and some groups in receipt of Income Support (IS) were able to enter an agreement only arrangement and therefore did not receive the AA weekly allowance of £30 for a maximum period of 20 weeks.

The introduction of Model 3 provided the opportunity for AA staff to work with young people with complex needs at a much earlier stage. It was widely reported that this earlier intervention and work with vulnerable groups of young people was both resource intensive and demanding for Connexions staff. Not all vulnerable groups were hard to reach. Indeed, some, such as young offenders, were easily contactable. Nonetheless, many young people on AA Model 3 were hard to engage and to help.

In some areas, concern was expressed about the extent to which referral agencies were using Model 3 as a mechanism to transfer the responsibility for very difficult clients to another programme (AA) and another agency (Connexions).

Closer working links had been established in most pilot areas, with Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), Leaving Care teams, Teen Parents groups, Pupil Referral services and Social Services (see below). Furthermore, the link between benefit receipt and agreement only AAs had been used positively to extend contact between Connexions and Jobcentre Plus staff in some pilot areas.

It was reported in some areas that the national guidance on Model 3 had been difficult to explain to both Connexions staff and other agencies.

2.1.4 Changes to payments

From April 2008, AA payments to young people were paid at £30 per week (in some pilot areas a £20 per week payment had been in operation), except in Model 2 areas, where financial support as part of AA was linked to a means tested EMA assessment, which in most cases would have been carried out while the young person was in full-time learning. A weekly payment of £20 to parents, which was paid in two pilot areas, prior to April 2008, was withdrawn.

In pilot areas where there had been an increase in the young person's weekly payment, the AA allowance was now regarded as being more attractive to young people and, together with the relaxation in the eligibility criteria, this made recruitment onto the programme much easier.

There was concern in one pilot area that an increase in the weekly AA payment had made the initiative a much more attractive offer in comparison to other EET options, most notably Entry to Employment (E2E), as the AA programme requirements, in terms of hours of activity, were much less onerous. It was felt that this might impact on early progression rates by acting as a disincentive for some young people to move onto other programmes/EET options.

The withdrawal of the parental payment was considered, in one area, to have had a negative effect on the support given by parents to encourage and motivate young people to participate and be retained on AAs.

2.2 Changes to management and staffing structures

Most AA pilot areas comprised a number of Local Authority areas. While AAs were welcomed in the pilot areas, the task of managing the initiative was dependent on the key role of project managers who oversaw the delivery of the pilot, in some cases across a number of different Local Authority (LA) areas. Since the introduction of the pilots in 2006, staff turnover among AA project managers had been nominal.

The transfer of responsibility and funding of Connexions Services to individual LA control from April 2008, and the 'pilot' status of AA had created a high level of uncertainty and insecurity among staff at all levels. In some cases there had also been a negative impact on staffing levels, in particular at operational level. Many pilot areas had experienced staff shortages, which had adversely affected AA delivery. In areas where existing staff caseloads had reached full capacity, waiting lists for AA entry were in operation. In one pilot area, AA staff conducted case conferences with mainstream Connexions PAs, in order to determine priority levels of entry into AA. However, despite the temporary nature of staff contracts, staffing levels in other pilot areas remained relatively stable.

The introduction, during the extension period, of the multiple entry points to AA had extended the AA eligible population and, in many instances, had increased caseload sizes among operational staff. Operational staff appointed to deliver AAs were given the job title of Personal Adviser (PA), Key Worker or Project Worker. Increasingly, pilot areas moved towards tiered staffing arrangements, which involved PAs, or equivalent grades of staffing, concentrating their efforts on engaging and supporting young people and less qualified staff managing tasks such as the brokering of AA provision and dealing with the administration of, for example, transport arrangements and payment queries.

Learning point: in one pilot area, PAs were trained to work with specific vulnerable groups such as JSA recipients or young people with LDD. This enabled staff to gain specialist knowledge and understanding, as well as to develop links with a network of local support and referral agencies.

There was a concern about the future delivery of AA within individual LA control, in that if the AA formed part of mainstream delivery, sufficient care would need to be taken to ensure that it retained the effective elements of the programme. For example, in LA areas where it was reported that AAs 'fitted comfortably' within the local NEET strategy, it was felt that the programme might 'get lost' within a raft of other local policy initiatives.

In order to counter the effects from the potential loss of specialist AA PAs, due to the pilot status of the programme, responsibility for AA delivery had sometimes been transferred to all mainstream PAs, thereby 'balancing the load'. There were mixed views about the value of adopting this approach. On the one hand, it enables more young people to enter the programme, while on the other hand, it was argued that AA delivery had benefited enormously from having small specialist teams of PAs, who had concentrated solely on meeting the needs of AA clients. In areas where the responsibility for the delivery of AA rested with mainstream PAs, it was argued that the true cost of implementing AA was hidden, since its operation was widely dispersed throughout Connexions resources.

2.3 Engagement with local stakeholders

While all pilot areas had updated their publicity and marketing materials to reflect the changes that had been made to the AA eligibility criteria, and, in some cases, to levels of weekly payments, referrals to the new AA delivery models had emanated largely from mainstream Connexions staff, other support agencies, such as YOTs and social services, and from an increased awareness among young people about the AA offer.

The introduction of Model 3 (vulnerable groups) had enabled AA managerial and operational staff to extend their links with other statutory and voluntary agencies. There was evidence that AA staff were working more closely with other agencies both to identify young people who were eligible for AA and to develop suitable and appropriate AA provision to meet specific needs.

'I've had referrals from mental health teams which before we hardly ever used to get. We've got really good links with YOS and the care team as well, so we're getting referrals through that way and people are phoning up and saying, I've recommended that this person comes onto the project.'

Connexions Personal Adviser

While joint working was broadly welcomed, some concern was expressed about the degree to which support agency staff were trying to influence the management and delivery of AA by Connexions staff, rather than focusing on offering additional support to young people. The introduction of a six-week eligibility period for vulnerable groups of young people had enabled support agencies to refer many more young people to the programme, since it had radically reduced the 'waiting time' required to access the programme. In some cases, it was felt that this had led to the potential of AA becoming a mechanism for some support agencies to dispense with some of their difficult clients, while at the same time it enabled them to meet their targets in terms of achieving education and training outcomes.

The introduction of the extended models had further strengthened links between Connexions Services and Jobcentre Plus (JC+). While the need for benefit checks had required ongoing contact between the two agencies since the beginning of the AA pilots, the introduction of the agreement only Model 3 for vulnerable groups had facilitated closer working between JC+ Under 18s Advisers and AA staff. Young people in receipt of Hardship Allowances or Income Support and who enter agreement only AAs continue to be monitored by both agencies. This has enhanced the exchange of information and a sharing of expertise between staff in some pilot areas. There were also instances of Jobcentre Plus Under 18s Advisers being much more likely to encourage young people who wished to make a claim for benefit, to think about AA as an alternative option, since they would receive both financial *and* individual intensive support, as well as the opportunity to participate in negotiated activities.

While there was positive evidence about closer working between Connexions Services and JobCentre Plus (JC+) the interpretation and understanding of the regulations regarding participation in AA and benefit receipt varied widely both within and between pilot areas. While national guidance had been issued, the application of regulations surrounding, in particular, the receipt of Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) and Income Support (IS) alongside participation in AA was surrounded by confusion and misunderstanding.

'I had a letter from JC+ this morning saying could you get back to me with some urgency because this young man has signed onto AA at the same time as he applied for JSA. I said can you let me know whether he's been successful in his application. And he sent back a note saying he needs to come in for another interview but if he signs onto the AA, he won't get his JSA.'

Connexions Personal Adviser

Learning point: the interaction between participation in AA and benefit receipt was subject to local interpretation of national guidance. This led to wide inconsistencies in practice and points to the need for standardised guidance to be produced and disseminated by both DCSF and DWP.

2.4 Managing provision - what works best?

Connexions Services managed the responsibility for procuring AA provision that met the needs of the young person. During the course of the piloting of AA, Connexions staff became increasingly confident, in terms of managing this responsibility, since they had little prior experience of this role. Learning and training programmes had traditionally been negotiated on the basis of volume and with fixed timetables, largely through local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs), as opposed to being designed to meet an individual young person's needs. Therefore, the ongoing task was to identify providers who could be flexible and responsive, in order to meet the needs of the AA client group and the objectives of the programme.

Most areas had developed a menu of activities to help promote the scale of opportunities available to young people, as well as a database of preferred suppliers. An annual review of provision and providers took place in most pilot areas. Managers engaged the support of PAs to help evaluate the effectiveness of provision, which in some cases involved conducting focus group meetings with operational staff to obtain feedback.

Connexions managers reported an increased ability to negotiate with local education and training providers to secure provision that was needed to meet specific requirements, as opposed to booking places on courses which already existed and where young people on AA were expected to 'slot in'. Private and voluntary sector training providers were reported to be largely much more flexible and amenable to the requirements of the AA programme,

although there were examples of good practice in some colleges. In addition, increased awareness about the operation of AA had sometimes resulted in providers approaching Connexions managers to offer bespoke packages of learning or training to meet individual requirements. This indicated a significant shift in approach.

'And now I've got far more providers who are offering the right thing at the right price and with referral rates that fit in with our kids and our delivery model and that's accounted for the sign-ups going up again.'

AA Area Manager

'The way the relationship worked with AA providers is very much around the sort of business/collaborative type relationship where you negotiate. I think the difficulty with working with LSC providers is they're not used to that kind of relationship.'

Connexions Area Manager

However, despite extended links with a range of providers, there often remained a disparity between young people's needs, in terms of provision, and local availability. For example, rural areas faced difficulties when provision was dominated by what was offered at large Further Education (FE) colleges and where a limited number of private and voluntary providers existed to source alternative provision. Accessing provision for vulnerable groups, in particular for young people with LDD, had also proved problematic in some localities. Securing 'free' provision was a prevalent feature during the extension AA phase (Pilot 2). Most pilot areas accessed an increased proportion of provision that was funded through other sources, most notably Local Authorities or the European Social Fund, thereby reducing AA costs. Examples included sports and leisure facilities and basic skills provision, which was available free of charge in some localities. In some areas, PAs ran in-house courses, such as anger management and self-esteem building programmes. The scale of provision which was underwritten by other funding streams, and the opportunity to access it, varied between local authority (LA) areas. For example, in one LA area, basic skills provision was available free of charge on a one-to-one tuition basis, while in a neighbouring LA, within the same pilot area, basic skills support could only be purchased through the AA Discretionary Fund at £38 per hour. There had been limited contact between Connexions Services and local LSCs to discuss the inter-relationship and any potential overlap between AA and mainstream provision.

'Last Autumn I was approached by my line manager and asked for information on provision through AA and why it works and all that kind of stuff and apparently the LSC were asking, so I fed back and sort of said it's the flexibility and I kept hammering that for all it was worth and the bite-sized chunks. Anyway, since then there's been a whole raft of fast-forward courses that are run by the local colleges that are offering an allowance and something like ... very short hours of attendance, much shorter than traditional for LSC funded provision. So I sort of think, well maybe the message is starting to filter through, but it's about three years too late.'

Connexions Area Manager

Learning point: One pilot area had built up a database of 'free' AA provision available within its LA areas. They were also working with a local awards team within one LA to look at ways in which they could credit different aspects of AA activities programmes.

During pilot 2, some pilot areas had placed an increased emphasis on securing AA provision which offered some form of accreditation. In some cases, this involved Connexion staff working alongside training providers to identify ways in which provision could be adapted to offer accreditation, as well as spreading the net of contracted providers, to increase accredited provision. While the opportunity to offer accredited provision was broadly

welcomed, some concern was expressed about the risk of losing the personalised learner journey that was the cornerstone of the AA offer, in a quest to achieve qualification outcomes as quickly as possible.

'They are, after all, NEET for a reason and undue haste and making people jump through hoops to prove that they've got skills may look good on paper - all people have now being credited with something - but actually, what we don't want to be doing is awarding them credit for what they already walked in with.'

Provider

AA provision toolkit - Bronze, Silver and Gold

One AA local authority area had devised a menu of AA provision, in which activities were divided into three ascending categories - bronze, silver and gold. The menu was designed to encourage young people to try a range of activities and to work towards courses which were often more popular and more expensive. Young people were required to complete two bronze activities before they could access the silver menu and to undertake two silver menu activities before they could embark on the gold menu.

- Bronze activities included: success coaching, work experience, health assessment, handling money and job club.
- Silver activities included: gym passes, plastering courses, Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards and motorcycle studies.
- Gold activities included: Supported work experience programmes with Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) awards and fabrication and welding courses.

'In (name of area) you have to do two bronze activities to earn a silver, two silver to earn a gold and obviously the stuff they really wanted to do ... your ... forklift truck were in the gold menu. Partly because of cost, and partly because that was kind of the carrot ... that's what the PAs used to sell it (AA). But I think it's quite a difficult concept for young people to get a grip of, and I don't think you can do that through a leaflet or a poster.'

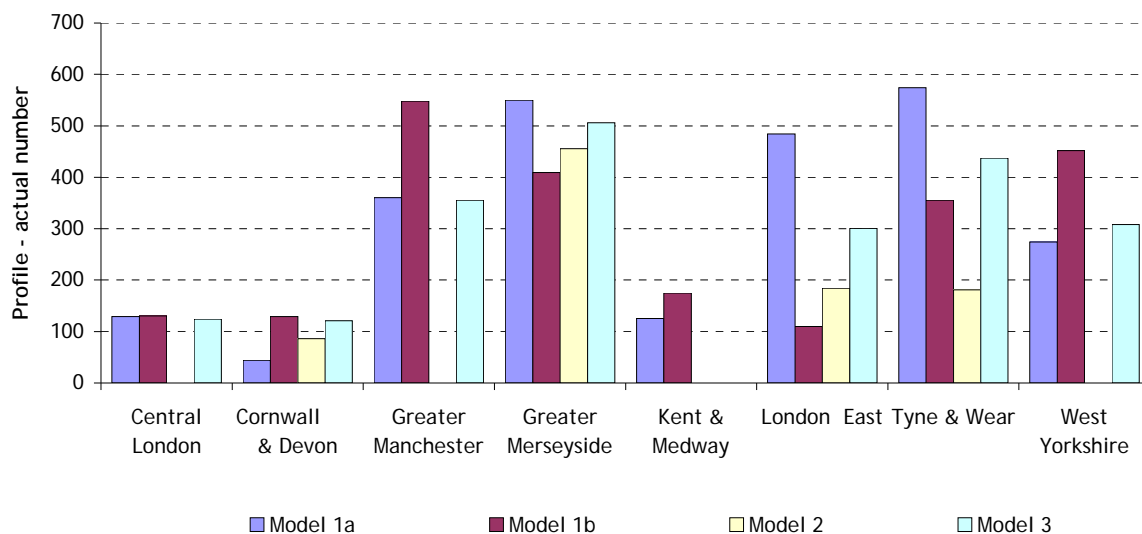
2.5 Management information

The Management Information for the Activity Agreements (AAMI) was collated by DCSF in an aggregated format by delivery model and by pilot area. The AAMI provided details of the pilot area target profiles, rates of recruitment, rates of decline, suspensions from AA, as well as the destinations and outcomes achieved by AA participants. The data presented in this section set out the position of the AA at the end of the Pilot 2 extension phase.

Individualised participant data was not available to the evaluation, although two pilot areas provided data for the cohort analysis (see Figure 2.1). Therefore, the evaluation was unable to assess the characteristics of the AA population. Similarly, data was not collated by DCSF at local authority level within each pilot area, although AA managers did collect this data and reported considerable local variation.

At the start of the extension year, managers were asked to set a month-by-month profile of the number of young people to be recruited onto AA which was broken down by each of the models operated. The profile was created on the basis of estimates of the local eligible population, trends in recruitment established during Pilot 1, and was contingent upon the staff capacity. Pilot managers reported that there had been some variation in the way the local eligible population was estimated. The profiles are shown in Figure 2.1 and this illustrates that there was considerable variation between pilot areas and different models.

Figure 2.1 - AA Profile by pilot area and by model



Source: AAMI (end of March 2009)

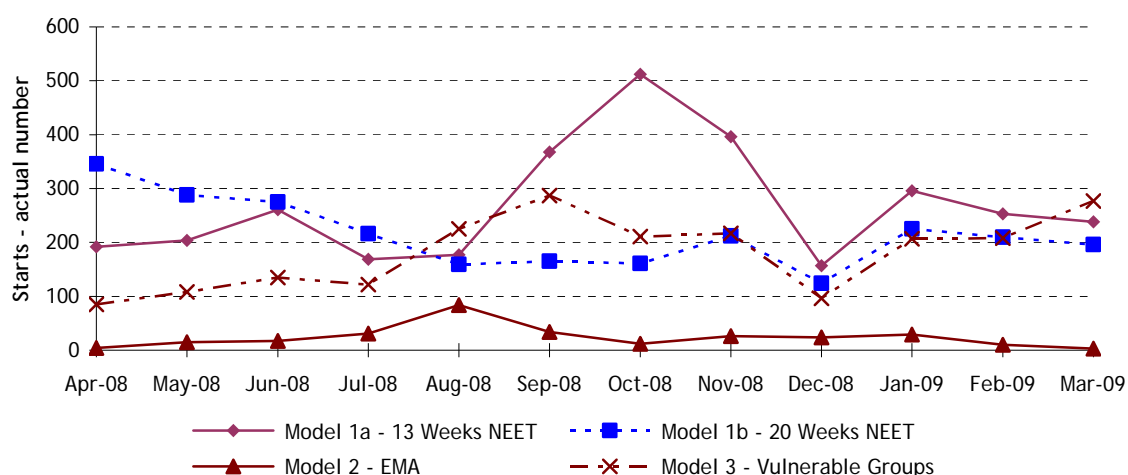
Inflows to the AA

Overall, 8,267 young people started on the AA in its extension year, compared to a profile of 8,726. The key reason for not achieving the profile was the underperformance of Model 2. This model achieved 29 per cent of planned starts (289 young people in number). This was despite some re-profiling during the extension year. While there was a peak in recruitment for Model 2 in August 2008, the overall trend was for small numbers to be recruited. The small size of the Model 2 group should be borne in mind throughout the ensuing analysis.

By the end of Pilot 2, Model 1a achieved 3,223 young person starts, representing 115 per cent of its profile. Model 1b achieved 2,577 starts (101 per cent of profile), and 2,178 starts were achieved for Model 3 (92 per cent of the profile figure). These data are presented as a time line in Figure 2.2.

There was a notable recruitment peak for Model 1a in October 2008, when young people who had not started post-16 learning became eligible for AA. Starts for Model 1b followed a declining trend overall, since young people were eligible for earlier intervention through Model 1a. In December, the number of starts on models 1a, 1b and 3 started to converge, and by January they achieved starts of between 200 and 300 young people each month.

Figure 2.2 - Number of AA starts, by model

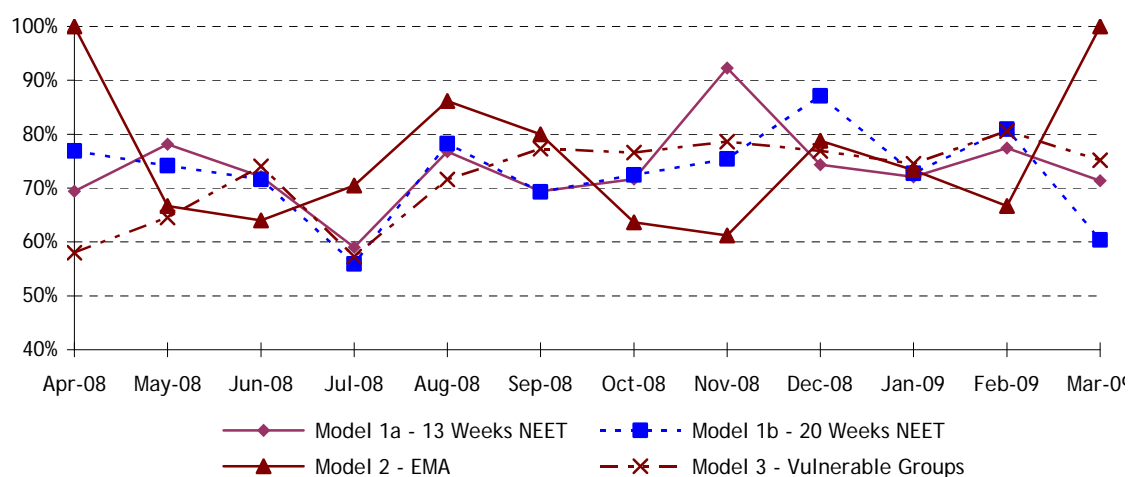


Source: AAMI (end of March 2009)

Proportion of young people who took up the AA offer

The evaluation assessed the take-up of the AA offer, against the number of offers made. Overall, by the end of the extension year (April 2009), take-up of offers converged at around 70–75 per cent across all models. Underpinning this figure was variation at pilot level, with lows of 40 per cent and highs of over 90 per cent in different pilot areas. It is unclear whether this reflects closer targeting of the offer, or inconsistencies in the recording of data. There was also variation in take-up by model and over time. This is shown, over time, by model in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3 - Take-up of AA offers by model



Source: AAMI (end of March 2009)

Why young people rejected the AA

Table 2.1 shows the reasons why young people rejected the offer of the AA, by model. This highlights that across all AA models, the financial incentive was the most frequently cited reason to reject the offer. Second most frequently recorded, were those categorised as other reasons. Young people were more likely to reject the offer of Model 3 on the basis of complex personal issues, or being a teenage parent.

The small number of young people who rejected Model 2 (n=39) illustrates the difficulty in finding the eligible group (within the recruitment window), rather than the AA offer being unattractive. However, still notable is the far higher proportion in this group that rejected the AA on the basis of the financial incentive available. The data do not report the level of EMA payment young people had received and therefore the extent to which the reduced AA incentive (of £10 or £20, if EMA was paid at this level) may have affected their decision.

Table 2.1 - Reasons for rejecting the offer of the AA (% of group who reject the AA)

	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 2	Model 3
Complex Personal Issues	5	7	5	12
Not Interested Financial / Inadequate Incentive	44	43	79	39
Not Interested Transport	1	1	0	1
Personal Circumstances - Illness / Health Reasons	5	8	3	9
Personal Circumstances - Teenage Parents	4	6	0	14
Personal Circumstances - Young Carers	0	1	0	1
Personal Circumstances - Pregnancy	5	3	0	5
Personal Circumstances - Religious Grounds	0	0	0	0
Other Personal Circumstances	8	9	13	4
Other Reason	28	23	0	16
N	472	504	39	410

Source: AAMI (end of March 2009)

Young people who were ineligible for AA

Pilot managers consistently reported the difficulty of gaining accurate information about young people and their status prior to contact with AA staff. When young people were found to be ineligible, the reasons for this were recorded in the AAMI and these are presented in Table 2.2.

By far the most frequently cited reasons for ineligibility for Model 1a and Model 3 was the inability to make contact with young people, or that young people were no longer NEET. For Model 1b the inability to make contact was also the main reason but the secondary reasons were more evenly spread, with a similar proportion of young people no longer NEET or claiming benefits.

Table 2.2 - The reasons why young people are ineligible for AA, by model (% of the group who were ineligible)

	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 2	Model 3
Unable to Contact	44	53	16	46
No Longer NEET	30	19	47	25
Claiming Benefit	12	15	16	17
Unable to Secure Relevant Suitable Provision	1	1	0	1
AA Not Suitable - Onward Referral	4	6	11	6
Planned Start Date in a Positive Outcome	9	6	11	4
N	713	567	45	500

Source: AAMI (end of March 2009)

It is not possible to accurately assess the proportion of the population which is ineligible for the AA, on the basis of the AAMI. It would be expected that the number of young people who were ineligible, combined with the number who rejected the offer of the AA and the number who accepted the offer would sum to the overall number of offers made. However, this is not the case and this is likely to reflect anomalies in recording data.

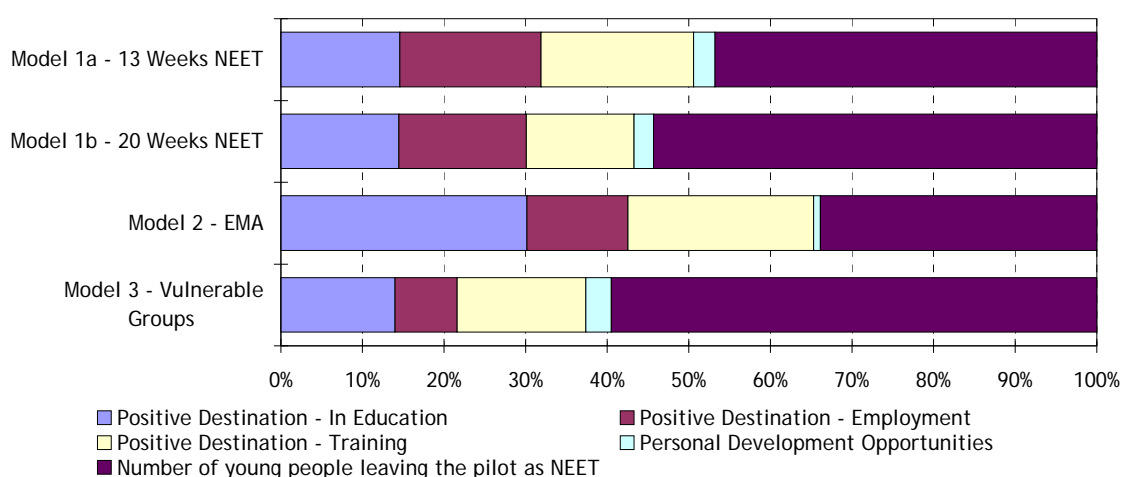
Outcomes from the AA

Outcomes from the AA were recorded such that young people may achieve a positive destination immediately following their participation, or return to the NEET category. For those who return to NEET, their status was tracked at 13 weeks and updated by the pilot areas. Since the young people who immediately achieved positive destination following the AA were not tracked at 13 weeks, it is not possible to combine the two rates of progression.

Immediate positive outcomes

By the end of March 2009, a total of 6,107 young people had left the AA. The destinations of these leavers, by model and by classification are shown in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4 - Destinations immediately following the AA, by model



Source: AAMI (end of March 2009)

In total, by the end of March 2009, in excess of two thousand young people (n=2,700) had progressed immediately from the AA into a positive destination¹. Reviewed by model, this shows:

- 49 per cent (1,175 young people) achieved a positive destination immediately following AA Model 1a participation
- 42 per cent (826 young people) as a result of engaging through Model 1b
- 65 per cent (158 young people) following Model 2 participation, and
- 36 per cent (545 young people) as a result of engaging through Model 3.

¹ Positive outcomes are: employment with or without training, education or training.

Due to the way in which the AAMI was collated, it is not possible to separate the destinations data for the first and second years of Pilot 1. Instead, the evaluation reviewed the proportion of leavers to a positive destination for Pilot 1 as a whole. This showed an immediate overall positive outcome rate of 47 per cent between April 2006 and April 2008. The extension year models compare favourably to this.

While there were many fewer young people recruited to Model 2, AA managers reported that positive outcomes were often easier to achieve for this group as a result of their more recent engagement in learning or training.

- Those who had entered Model 2 were most likely to go back to education or enter training. Reviewing this in detail showed that 73 young people left to education (46 per cent), 30 to employment (19 per cent), 55 to training (35 per cent). This group appeared least likely to leave to a NEET destination, 34 per cent (83 young people).
- For Model 1a, a smaller proportion, 29 per cent and 339 young people in number, left to education; 402 to employment (34 per cent), 434 to training (37 per cent). A larger proportion of this group left to the NEET category (48 per cent and 1,114 in number).
- For Model 1b, 275 young people left to education (33 per cent), 296 to employment (36 per cent), 251 to training (31 per cent). For this model, just over half of the young people (56 per cent, 1,095 in number) left to the NEET category which was slightly more than in Model 1a.
- For Model 3, 204 young people left to education (37 per cent), 111 to employment (20 per cent), 230 to training (42 per cent). This group was most likely to leave to a NEET destination (61 per cent, and 931 young people). This may be a result of the greater complexity of barriers for this group.

DCSF does not include participation in Personal Development Opportunities (PDO) as a formal positive destination, however, engagement in these is suggestive of some improvement in young people's degree of participation over returning to NEET. In addition to the outcomes above, 61 young people left Model 1a to a PDO, for Model 1b the number was 45, for Model 2, two young people progressed to a PDO and 46 left Model 3 to PDO.

Among all Pilot 2 delivery models, the outcomes improved over time, although a peak was evident in September 2008, which was most likely to be an effect of the start of the academic year. There was a dip in positive outcomes in December 2008 despite, perhaps a greater potential for temporary, seasonal work at this time of year.

Young people who re-entered the NEET category

Table 2.3 shows the distribution, across the NEET destinations defined by DCSF, of young people who returned to NEET immediately following AA participation. The unemployment category included young people seeking employment, those with a start date agreed for EET and young people waiting for an E2E placement; while the not available category included young people with ill-health, a pregnancy or those who had moved away. The not NEET or EET category included asylum seekers and young people in custody.

Table 2.3 - Destinations of young people who returned to NEET following the AA (% of group returning to NEET)

	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 2	Model 3
NEET - Unemployment	87	84	93	76
NEET - Not available	8	9	5	16
NEET - Not EET or NEET	5	6	2	8
N	1,144	1,095	83	931

Source: AAMI (end of March 2009)

- In Model 1a, of those young people leaving to a NEET destination, 87 per cent were unemployed (comprised of 82 per cent seeking employment, 6 per cent with an EET start date agreed and 3 per cent waiting for an E2E placement). Eight per cent of young people were defined as not available.
- In Model 1b, of those young people leaving to a NEET destination, 84 per cent were unemployed (comprised of 85 per cent of leavers seeking work, 5 per cent waiting to start EET, 2 per cent waiting for an E2E place and 5 per cent not yet ready for work or learning). Slightly more young people on this model than Model 1a went on to be not available (9 per cent). These two models had very similar rates of young people leaving to a NEET destination.
- In Model 2, of those young people leaving to a NEET destination, 93 per cent were to the unemployed category (comprised of 88 per cent seeking employment, 5 per cent waiting to start a planned EET destination, and 1 per cent waiting for a place on an E2E course). Five per cent of this group were defined as unavailable.
- In Model 3, of those young people leaving to a NEET destination, 76 per cent were categorised as unemployed (made up of 77 per cent seeking employment, 4 per cent waiting to go on to an EET destination, 4 per cent waiting for E2E provision, and 13 per cent were recorded as not yet ready for work or learning). Within this model, 16 per cent were unavailable at the end of their AA.

Outcomes at the 13-week tracking point

Young people who left the AA to NEET destinations were tracked at 13 weeks to review their status. The rates of achieving a positive destination within 13 weeks of leaving the AA to NEET are shown in Table 2.4. Since young people who left the AA immediately to positive outcomes are not tracked at 13 weeks, the evaluation cannot comment on the additional effect of the 13-week post-AA outcomes.

Table 2.4 - Proportion of post-AA NEET achieving positive destination at 13 weeks

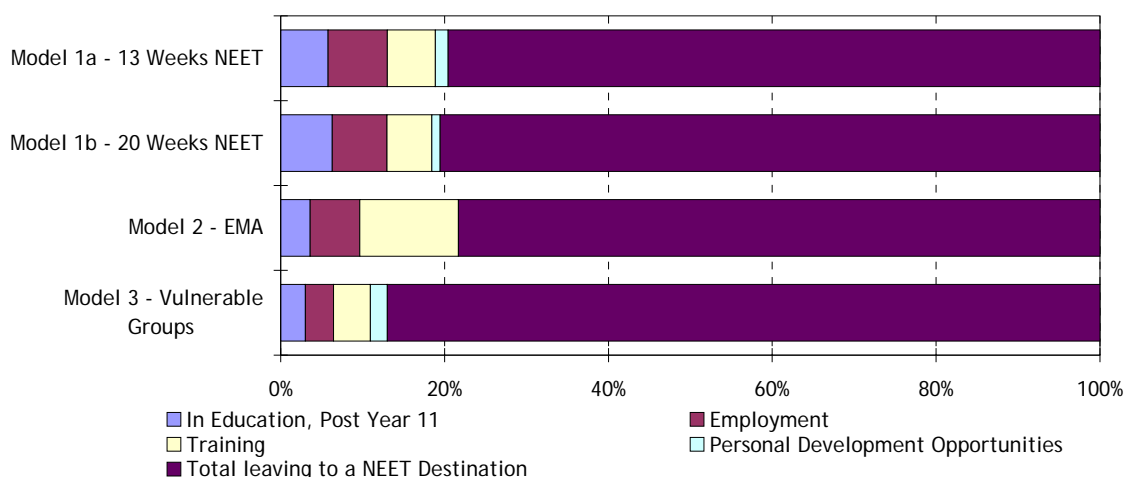
	Model 1a (%)	Model 1b (%)	Model 2 (%)	Model 3 (%)
Positive destination at 13 weeks post-AA	19	18	22	11
N	216	202	18	102

Note: includes positive outcomes at the 13-week tracking point only for those NEET immediately following AA participation

Source: AAMI (end of March 2009)

The pattern of outcomes was much the same at the 13-week tracking point (which included only those young people who left AA to NEET) for each of the models. The positive destination that these young people were most likely to achieve was employment (see Figure 2.5), and within this they were most likely to go on to 'employment without training to NVQ 2', followed by 'employment with locally recognised training'.

Figure 2.5 - Destinations of young people, NEET post-AA, when tracked at 13 weeks



Note: includes positive outcomes at the 13-week tracking point only for those NEET immediately following AA participation

Source: AAMI (end of March 2009)

Issues arising from the analysis of the AAMI

The AAMI offers a quantitative expression of some of the issues identified by staff throughout the course of Pilot 2. For instance, it illustrates the struggle to operate Model 2 effectively, and the lesser likelihood of positive outcomes for vulnerable young people. This analysis concludes with some final thoughts about the coverage of the AAMI and how data capture might be improved to better reflect the action of the AA.

Firstly, the data regarding the uptake of the AA for Model 2 and 3, which embed the entitlement to much earlier intervention, do not show any flow of young people between these models and Model 1a (and indeed Model 1b) if, for instance, the recruitment window for Model 2 had been missed, or if a vulnerable young person had not been identified as such during pre-assessment phases. AA managers in a number of areas noted that this was an emergent pattern of operation, in that some young people were not in the model which best defined their individual circumstances.

Secondly, the data do not record the soft outcomes or accreditation achieved by young people during the course of the AA. Data from the previous programme theory research¹ showed AA increased the capacity to move forward and improved self-confidence, as well as broadening young people's CVs through participation in literacy and numeracy courses, Level 1 vocational learning and work-related certificates such as first aid, health and safety and forklift licences. Capturing soft outcomes and other forms of accreditation such as these, helps to illustrate positive development among young people who return to the NEET group.

¹ Newton, B., Levesley, T., Oakley, J., Fearn, H. and Johnson, C. (2009) *Activity and Learning Agreement Pilots Programme Theory Evaluation; Activity Agreements and Small Step Progression*, Working Paper 5, DCSF-RR098.

Furthermore, for all young people who participate in AA, sustaining contact (and support when needed) from Connexions is an important outcome. Chapter 4 shows that many are isolated from support services. A benefit of sustained contact is likely to be that support can be configured if young people have a future need.

The 13-week tracking point may not be a sufficient time period to capture the longer term outcomes for young people, for instance, for young parents who may need a greater length of time out of learning or the labour market to allow them to look after their child. Longer term tracking of certain groups may demonstrate enhanced outcomes from AA participation.

Finally, while the 13-week tracking of young people who re-enter the NEET category following AA participation, would identify some young people that would be eligible to return to AA for a second time through Model 1a entry, the data do not record this trend. The young person research undertaken for the case studies detailed in this report, show a small proportion of young people do return to the AA. Understanding the frequency with which this happens, and more importantly the characteristics of this group, may help to target support more closely, in order to address their needs.

2.6 Conclusion

- The changes which were introduced in April 2008 were **broadly welcomed**, since they had broadened the potential for engaging with a greater volume of young people who were NEET and, in many cases, offered earlier intervention.
- **Model 1a** provided the opportunity to offer AA to young people at an earlier point (13 weeks).
- **Model 2** had been the most difficult part of the AA extension phase to implement, since it had required Connexions Services to develop and introduce *new* systems, in order to engage both with referral agencies and directly with a new group of young people.
- It was widely reported that earlier intervention and work with vulnerable groups of young people, through **Model 3** delivery, was both resource intensive and demanding for Connexions staff. Not all vulnerable groups were hard to reach. Indeed, some, such as young offenders, were easily contactable. Nonetheless, many young people on AA Model 3 were hard to engage and to help.
- The introduction, during the extension period, of the **multiple entry points to AA** had extended the AA eligible population and, in many instances, had increased caseload sizes among operational staff.
- There was a concern about the future delivery of AA within individual LA control, in that if the AA formed part of mainstream delivery, sufficient care would need to be taken to ensure that it retained the effective elements of the programme. For example, in LA areas where it was reported that AAs 'fitted comfortably' within the local NEET strategy, it was felt that the programme might 'get lost' within a raft of other local policy initiatives.
- The **AAMI** provided details of the pilot area target profiles, rates of recruitment, rates of decline, suspensions from AA, as well as the destinations and outcomes achieved by AA participants. Overall, 8,267 young people started on the AA in its extension year.

3 DELIVERY OF AAs

This chapter examines the delivery of the AA pilots and focuses, where possible, on changes which occurred during the extension period (Pilot 2). In particular, it examines engagement with young people, best practice in operating AAs, how the Discretionary Fund (DF) was used, progression and the legacy from participating in AA. The chapter concludes with an overview of the perspectives from providers and support agencies on the operation of the AA pilots.

3.1 Engaging with young people

The introduction of four AA entry points (Models 1a, 1b, 2 and 3) was a difficult message to convey, particularly in areas which were operating a number of different models. While publicity material was changed to reflect the introduction of the new models, pilot managers and AA operational staff relied far more heavily on referrals from Connexions PAs and external agencies which worked with young people during Pilot 2. A considerable amount of time had been spent by pilot managers and AA operational staff in attending meetings to brief Connexions staff and other agencies about the changes which had been made to AAs from April 2008. AA staff continued to use 'NEET lists', which were generated on a monthly basis from destination data to identify eligible young people, although there was a much greater emphasis on extending and updating understanding among generic Connexions PAs and other local stakeholders about the existence of AA and the new delivery models. Consequently, an increased number of applications to AA were generated through direct referrals to the initiative. 'Word of mouth' recommendation from young people also acted as a key system of referral in all pilot areas.

'It's a needs based programme. You need to sit them down and explain what it is And that then offers that young person the best service they can have and that's not done by poster, that's face-to-face contact.'

Connexions AA Co-ordinator

The extension to the eligible population which resulted from the opening out of the NEET eligibility period for AA entry, brought with it the opportunity for AA staff in most pilot areas to offer earlier intervention to young people in the NEET group and to work with new cohorts of clients, such as young people who had recently dropped out of learning (Model 2). Moving away from the standard NEET 20-week entry criteria also introduced new peaks and troughs, in terms of entry points to the programme. Prior to the introduction of Pilot 2, the peak AA entry point had been in November, when the bulk of summer school leavers had reached the 20-week NEET point. The introduction of Models 1a, 2 and 3 resulted in some groups of young people accessing AA at a much earlier stage, most notably at 13 weeks (Model 1a) and between six (Model 2 and 3) and eight weeks (Model 2). There was widespread agreement that earlier intervention enabled many young people to benefit from intensive support at a point when they were still motivated to engage in education, employment or training (EET). A short period of intensive intervention facilitated their transition into EET. In contrast, young people who were 20+ weeks NEET before entering AA were often described as being much harder to motivate, since they had exhausted many other options before entering the programme and had spent much longer periods of time locked into inactivity.

'And actually what happened, we sent out the letters and we've never had such a response in those original couple of groups, because at 13 weeks, they haven't got so depressed that they're just sitting on a sofa and can't be bothered to do anything. They're still full of hope ... and they actually picked up the phone and were quite enthusiastic.'

Connexions Personal Adviser

In pilot areas where the weekly AA financial allowance was raised to £30 per week as part of Pilot 2 arrangements, the increase was welcomed. It also equated to the maximum EMA entitlement, which was a well-known 'brand' and young people recognised the allowance as being an entitlement they might be able to continue to claim, if they moved onto education and training.

'And I think that's a real positive as well because they need that £30, and you tell them it's not EMA, but in their head it's their EMA. They're quite comfortable about going on to a college course where they're still getting their £30. It's an easier transition. They know they can cope on the money and they're used to it.'

Connexions Personal Adviser

In addition, during Pilot 2, the AA programme was reported to be increasingly competing with other local initiatives targeted at the NEET group, in particular European Social Fund (ESF) funded programmes, which had the advantage of taking young people out of local NEET statistics, if they participated in the programme. The financial pressure within LAs to reduce NEET statistics, is exemplified in the following quote, where AA was counted as a positive outcome within the local area.

'... and also because AAs were classed as EET for our PSA [Public Service Agreement] target, the PAs were only too anxious as the November deadline approached to get as many as possible on, to actually help us to meet our NEET target, which was very challenging. So AA played a big part in contributing to that. Otherwise the Local Authority would have lost about 500k I think.'

Connexion Manager

Learning point: A significant barrier to stimulating referrals to AA, in particular from mainstream Connexions staff and some support agencies, was that young people who participated in AA in most LA areas remained classified as NEET. Therefore, referring young people to AA did not reduce local NEET statistics and in some cases acted as a disincentive to recommend the programme to young people.

In pilot areas which operated Model 3, it was reported that, while most vulnerable groups of young people were not difficult to identify, the process of recruiting them onto the AA and supporting their needs during the programme could be demanding, because of their often complex needs. For example, young offenders may break their court orders or re-offend and were taken into custody or young people from travelling communities left the area. In order to improve retention rates among Model 3 clients in particular, some areas had introduced an extended initial assessment period during their first few weeks on the programme, so that their specific needs could be more accurately determined and met. However, the chaotic nature of some young people's lives often made planning and sustaining their participation on AA very difficult. Teenage parents represented the largest sub-group within areas operating Model 3. Links with teenage pregnancy and parenting services in each locality made contact with this group more straightforward. Attendance at parenting classes and support groups could also form part of the AA package, which helped young people engage with Connexions services.

A number of pilot areas reported that a barrier to recruiting young people in receipt of JSA and who could enter AA on an 'agreement only' basis since they were not entitled to receive the AA weekly allowance, was that they could not be counted within local area profile targets, which acted as a disincentive to include many young people from this group. PAs reported that they had only been able recruit young people in receipt of JSA when they had gaps in their caseloads, which in some cases was infrequent due to the expanded population that existed within Pilot 2. This reporting restriction was lifted within the operation of Pilot 3 (2009/10).

3.2 Best practice in operating Pilot 2 AAs

Presented below are a number of approaches, which were adopted by pilot areas to implement the different delivery models and operated within Pilot 2.

- PAs focused on the delivery of one specific model. In one area, PAs had a specialist remit to cover Model 1, 2 or 3. Depending on the model on which they focused, they were responsible for developing links with mainstream PAs and external agencies or support services to promote awareness of a specific delivery model and to develop closer inter-agency working.
- PAs focused on one specific vulnerable group, such as pregnant teenagers, young carers or young people with LDD, to support Model 3 delivery. This enabled PAs to develop a specialism and, crucially, to establish contacts with key local agencies which worked exclusively with particular groups of vulnerable teenagers.
- Post-16 courses which had high drop-out rates, eg foundation level programmes, were targeted to support Model 2 delivery. PAs in one area established contact with course tutors where drop-out rates were known to be high, in order to encourage referrals to Model 2. This approach was considered to be more informal and young people could be contacted more quickly, as opposed to receiving formal notification of leavers solely through central college systems. This approach would appear to be a mechanism for identifying, at an early stage, potential drop-outs and then providing targeted assistance.
- Colleges were encouraged to offer accreditation to young people as part of their AA work taster programmes. This helped some young people to progress to mainstream provision.
- The range of providers was diversified in order to meet the needs of an increased number of young people entering AA through Pilot 2. Many pilot areas recognised the need 'to think outside the box', in terms of identifying provision and suitable contacts.
- Accreditation was built around existing programmes, which were offered by private training providers. Connexions staff worked with existing providers to design ways in which existing AA provision could receive formal accreditation or could be slightly adapted to achieve a qualification outcome.
- Conducting an annual review with each AA provider in the area formed part of the contracting process. This helped to determine the extent to which provision was meeting local needs.
- Ongoing evaluation of the AA package was carried out. In one pilot area, young people completed an exit evaluation, as well as providing feedback during the course of their programme, to ensure that their needs were met. Another pilot area organised a youth forum in order to obtain feedback about the standard and choice of provision.

3.3 How the Discretionary Fund was used

Earlier evaluation evidence highlighted the Discretionary Fund (DF) as a critical success factor in the effective delivery of AAs¹. The DF gave Project Managers and their staff the autonomy, the capacity and the responsibility for commissioning individual or group packages of learning and training, and funding any associated costs. It continued to play an integral role within Pilot 2 delivery.

'It's not just the £30 a week, which I don't think made a massive difference but it helps, but it's the money that goes behind what the key worker can do with that money in terms of support and the offer to the young person and what that young person can do in their locality.'

Connexions Manager

The DF offered young people additional incentives to participate in AA, as well as breaking down potential barriers to young people's progression into mainstream education and training provision. For example, as well as meeting the costs of procuring bespoke education and training provision for some AA participants, the DF was used to meet travel and equipment costs for both young people on the AA programme, and those who were making the transition into full-time education and training options. Some young people were offered extended support, which might have included assistance with clothing costs, child care and travel costs, for up to four weeks after they had finished their AA. Additional support was needed for young people who had parents in receipt of benefits and had applied for EMA. In some instances, their EMA applications had not been assessed before they had started E2E programmes, and this resulted in them being unable to meet their travel and support costs unless they received interim funding.

A number of pilot areas reported that they expected to report an underspend on DF during Pilot 2, because of their increasing focus on identifying and utilising 'free' provision in their localities (see section 2.4).

3.4 Progression from AA

Rates of progression from AA, derived from the MI analysis, are presented in 2.5. This section provides qualitative feedback from the implementation study about progression from AA and for the varying rates between the different delivery models.

The impact of the recession was considered to be a significant factor in the decline of education, training and employment outcomes for young people completing AA in 2008/9. It was widely reported that contracting local labour markets had had a negative impact on the availability of employment opportunities for young people. There had been a reduction in the availability of both jobs with training (including Apprenticeships) and jobs without training, and this, in turn, had a knock-on effect in terms of increasing competition for places on post-16 education and training places courses. For example, it became increasingly difficult for AA graduates to secure places on E2E courses, because funding for courses had been cut and there were waiting lists for entry, due to the tightening job market. It was felt that some post-16 education college courses had become beyond the reach of young people leaving AA, because of entry qualification requirements being raised due to the volume of applicants.

¹ Maguire, S., Thompson, J., Hillage, J., Dewson, S., Miller, L., Johnson, C., Newton, B., Bates, P. and Page, R. (2009) *Activity Agreement Pilots Process Evaluation* DCSF-RR095.

Learning point: *The importance of measuring soft outcomes from AA was considered to be a crucial measure of success from AA, in particular among young people from vulnerable groups, where immediate progression to education and training could be an unrealistic expectation, given the barriers to engagement, which needed to be overcome.*

'I think with some of them it seems like almost every time you see them there is something else. One problem has been resolved, but there is another one. And a lot of times it takes so much time to get through all that, that you maybe have not got as much opportunity to go straight for training or a job. It would not be realistic for them. You would be almost setting them up to fail.'

Connexions Personal Adviser

Other factors which were perceived to have influenced progression rates included the following:

- Outcomes were affected by seasonal factors, such as education and training start dates and the availability of seasonal work.
- Those recruited to Model 1a were easier to progress to positive outcomes since they tended to be recent school leavers and earlier intervention made it easier to achieve re-engagement. Those on Model 1b tended to achieve softer outcomes from AA.
- It was easier to progress young people from Model 2, as they had recently been engaged in learning.
- Progression rates were lowest from Model 3, where most young people were from vulnerable groups and had significant barriers to progression to overcome. However, there were differences between vulnerable sub-groups in terms of their motivation to progress from AA. For example, it was reported that young offenders and looked after groups had high non-attendance rates, while teenage mothers enjoyed social interaction and engaging in positive activities.
- Geography was a factor in shaping the structure of opportunities which were available locally to young people.

3.5 The perspective from providers and support agencies

Education and training providers were positive about AAs as a strategy to address the needs of young people in the NEET group and many respondents had been involved in the delivery of AA provision for some time. However, detailed understanding among providers about the introduction of the new delivery models was limited. In particular, changes relating to the reduced eligibility criteria for entry onto the programme were not widely understood. This could be attributed to the role they fulfil within the AA process, as the deliverers of provision. Providers responded to the needs of young people who were referred to them by the Connexions Services and were therefore not actively involved in the recruitment process. While there was limited recognition that new delivery models had been introduced, a number of respondents reported an increase in the number of young people who had been referred to them and who required a greater degree of intensive support. This could have been attributed to the introduction of Model 3.

'... we seem to be working a lot with the hard-to-reach young people which would be those that are at risk of being offenders, or having been offending and are at risk of being sent down. So we've got a big area of the really tough nuts and then we've got another area of the young people with very low self-esteem and confidence'

Voluntary Sector Provider

In pilot areas where the weekly allowance paid to young people had increased, this was broadly welcomed among providers. While the introduction of a £30 per week AA allowance in some areas had equalised the financial incentive paid to most young people on E2E, providers reported no real conflict of interest between the two programmes. Many providers were involved in the delivery of both programmes and viewed AA as an effective engagement strategy and E2E provision as a progression route for some of those who had completed AA.

Voluntary sector providers felt that earlier entry onto AA had enabled them to engage much earlier with young people who had reached statutory school leaving age but who had, in reality, not participated in formal learning for a considerable period of time.

3.5.1 Other support agencies

The introduction of the new delivery models was better understood among staff from the Youth Offending Service (YOS), the Youth Service and JC+. In some pilot areas, the introduction of Model 3 had facilitated closer links between YOS and Connexions, as YOS workers could make more immediate referrals to AA. Prior to the introduction of Model 3, the 20-week eligibility criteria had created a barrier for entry onto the programme among young offenders who required more immediate interventions. Consequently, up until April 2008, many YOT workers appeared to have made limited use of AA.

'Up to April this year, when the criteria changed, which was really interesting to us because the number of weeks people have to be NEET is just six, five or six. The level of money has increased, £30 so now it's equivalent to EMA and it's still for 20 weeks. So, but, what it means is that young people, because (name of pilot area) is much more deprived in terms of provision at the entry level ... So it really is seen as a real opportunity for young people who are involved in YOT, because the 20-week criteria was problematic.'

YOS Manager

In one pilot area, a YOS team had linked a young offenders' reparation programme with AA delivery. The reparation part of the programme involved young people repairing bicycles and the AA element had introduced accreditation for the work, with a group of young people completing a qualification in bicycle repair work.

3.5.2 Links with Connexions

The majority of respondents spoke very positively about their links with Connexions. Education and training providers were satisfied with the ways in which contracts had been set up and managed. In two areas, administrative procedures for contract management were described as over-bureaucratic. While some providers were disappointed by the number of AA referrals that they had received in the third year of delivery, in other pilot areas AA numbers had increased. However, most providers accepted that demand for provision was driven by young people's needs. PAs were in regular contact with providers through accompanying young people for initial interviews, attending sessions and through conducting mostly weekly follow-ups with providers to check on attendance numbers.

Learning point: Basic skills providers would have welcomed more involvement with PAs in the initial assessment of young people's needs, so that provision could be more tailored to meeting individual needs.

While some providers would have valued more background information about participants before courses started, in order to assist their course planning, they recognised that the composition and nature of the client group often made it difficult for this information to be made available. In addition, many providers suggested that they would have welcomed more feedback on the destinations of young people who had completed AA.

3.5.3 Marketing and publicity material

While all pilot areas had updated their publicity and marketing materials to reflect the changes that had been made to the AA eligibility criteria, and, in some cases, to levels of weekly payments, most local stakeholders, including both providers and other support agencies, reported that they were unaware of local AA marketing and publicity material. Their involvement in, and understanding of, the initiative had emanated from direct contact with the Connexions Service personnel.

A number of respondents felt that AAs would have benefited from wider publicity among both local stakeholders and young people.

3.5.4 Collaboration with other agencies

While most local stakeholders were satisfied with their links to Connexions with regard to the delivery of AA, there appeared to be limited or no contact, through AA, with other agencies or education and training providers who were involved in the initiative. The development of closer links between local stakeholders involved in AA delivery would have been welcomed and would have facilitated the sharing of good practice, as well as enhancing the cohesion of the initiative at local level.

3.5.5 Perceptions about the current and future role of AAs

Local stakeholders were overwhelmingly positive about AAs. Firstly, it was viewed as an initiative which had successfully delivered individualised and flexible packages of learning. It was felt by some respondents that the delivery mechanism for AA provision had challenged 'the norm' that learning and progression could only take place as standardised group activities within formal learning settings. Secondly, it was argued that AAs complemented, as opposed to competed with, other local education and training, as 'the offer' was fundamentally different in its approach. Finally, the intensive support offered to young people by Connexions PAs was highly valued among the majority of stakeholders.

'I also know that, within the AA, some people have tried to characterise young people and group them together and send them all on 12-week courses. All they are doing is copying the failure of the schools and colleges that have failed before.'
Youth Service Manager

'We give them bites of learning in short bursts and then a cup of tea and then we build their stamina up so that it's bit by bit.'
Training Provider

Respondents were also asked if the AA model should be implemented as part of the RPA agenda. It was widely asserted that a programme which offered young people ownership of their learning, together with intensive and financial support, was crucial for engaging a cohort which had too often struggled with formal learning, ie compulsory schooling. It was also suggested that consideration should be given to extending young people's length of stay on AAs or a similar initiative.

'I do think there's a need because you've got disaffected people, who don't know where they're at and they don't know which way they want to go. They're almost a bit frightened of taking that step forward in case the door gets slammed in their face. So the sort of things that they've been doing helps them increase their confidence, it increases their skills and to be totally honest it helps them feel a whole lot better about themselves.'

Provider

However, while there was positive feedback about a future role for the AA model, there was a concern that it may be swallowed up amongst the plethora of other initiatives being delivered within local government. Some respondents also suggested that a similar initiative to AA should be piloted within 11-16 schooling, as a strategy to prevent young people 'falling out of the system'.

3.6 Conclusion

- The introduction of **four AA entry points** (Models 1a, 1b, 2 and 3) was a difficult message to convey, particularly in areas which were operating a number of different models. While publicity material was changed to reflect the introduction of the new models, pilot managers and AA operational staff relied far more heavily on referrals from Connexions PAs and external agencies which worked with young people during Pilot 2.
- In pilot areas where the weekly **AA financial allowance** was raised to £30 per week as part of Pilot 2 arrangements, the increase was welcomed. It also equated to the maximum EMA entitlement, which was a well-known 'brand' and young people recognised the allowance as being an entitlement they might be able to continue to claim, if they moved onto education and training.
- During Pilot 2, the AA programme was reported to be increasingly competing with **other local initiatives** targeted at the NEET group, in particular ESF funded programmes, which had the advantage of taking young people out of local NEET statistics, if they participated in the programme.
- **The Discretionary Fund (DF)** continued to play an integral role within Pilot 2 delivery¹. The DF gave Project Managers and their staff the autonomy, the capacity and the responsibility for commissioning individual or group packages of learning and training, and funding any associated costs.
- The importance of **measuring soft outcomes** from AA was considered to be a crucial measure of success from AA, in particular among young people from vulnerable groups, where immediate progression to education and training could be an unrealistic expectation, given the barriers to engagement, which needed to be overcome.
- **Education and training providers** were positive about AAs as a strategy to address the needs of young people in the NEET group, although there was limited detailed understanding among them about the introduction of the new delivery models.
- In some pilot areas, the introduction of Model 3 had facilitated **closer links between YOS and Connexions**, as YOS workers could make more immediate referrals to AA. Prior to the introduction of Model 3, the 20-week eligibility criteria had created a barrier for entry onto the programme among young offenders who required more immediate interventions.

¹ Maguire et al. (2009) *Activity Agreement Pilots Process Evaluation*, Research Report DCSF-RR095.

4 WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE THINK OF AA

This chapter reports the experiences of young people interviewed in the case study areas. They are drawn therefore from three pilot areas (and one local authority in each of these). Each case study took as its focus one of the new delivery models introduced in Pilot 2.

4.1 Young people's contexts

4.1.1 Educational history and family contexts

Most of the young people who were interviewed had completed GCSEs at the end of Year 11, although the majority did not achieve the equivalent of a Level 2 qualification. Their results ranged from one or two B-C grades and a larger number of D-U grades to having achieved only a handful of lower grade qualifications. A few young people had only taken one or two exams, and a very small group had gained no qualifications while at school.

A significant proportion reported negative attitudes to school which had resulted from being bullied, and/or a dislike of authority. Several had patchy attendance records from Year 9 onwards. A small number had been excluded or had removed themselves from mainstream schooling in their final years. Some of these had completed Key Stage 4 at college and a couple had attended pupil referral units.

The majority of young people were living at home with their parent(s), although for young people whose parents had separated or divorced, there was often movement between the two homes. This led to a fragmented home life. A small number had experienced homelessness. Of the young parents, a minority lived independently; the extent of involvement of the child's father varied. Across Models 1 and 2, home lives were in general fairly settled but young people on Model 3 had the most unstable home life and were most likely to live independently.

Other differences also emerged in analysis related to post-16 activity and decision-making. Some young people (often recruited through Model 2) displayed more positive attitudes towards education and learning and appeared to be generally more motivated to move themselves forward. This group had applied for and gained a college or training place, although for various reasons they had left their course. In contrast, the less motivated group often said they had been interested in going to college. However, they had missed the application deadline or had not gained a place (nor established a 'back-up' plan). This latter group appeared the most likely to enter the NEET category, and remain in it, following school.

Reasons to leave post-16 learning and training

For those who had been successful in gaining a college or training place, there had been some difficulty sustaining it. Some of the reasons for drop-out related to the experience of college such as not liking the course, the environment or the tutor. In other cases, colleges had accepted young people to do one course, and then when it was over-subscribed, had assigned them to an alternative without consultation. Young people in this situation often felt the alternative was not suitable. Those who stayed on at their school's 6th form were the most likely to have had difficulties with the learning environment, finding it 'too much like school'.

The logistics and costs of travelling long distances to the college or training provider was a problem for a significant group, even with EMA support. There were structural problems too, in that some young people had left college since no support was made available to help them find a work placement for their apprenticeship. For this group, dropping out was inevitable since, without a placement, they could not complete their qualification. A smaller group had found work placements but had to leave because the employer could not keep them for the duration of the course. For one or two, the economic climate had affected their provider's ability to continue the course.

Leaving post-16 learning or training tended to affect young people in one of two ways. One group recognised that leaving was due to a peripheral factor and it did not impact on their decision about learning in the future. In contrast, the other group was strongly negative about returning to learning.

4.2 Young people's AA starting points

The majority of young people, across the new AA models, were **work-focused** on entry to the AA and many had spent considerable time applying for jobs without success. All were disappointed that employers seemed unwilling to give them a chance. For some, their desire to work was also driven by a lack of understanding about the demands of further education, perhaps suggesting the need for information, advice and guidance to address this.

'I was thinking about going back to college in September, to do dressmaking, but it takes three years on EMA at full-time college. I could earn more in an eight-hour job in retail, and [at college] it would be like £30 a week until I'm 21. So I don't think I want to do that now. I just want a job.'

Young person recruited through Model 2

Other young people were **learning- or training-focused**. These tended to have previous experience of college and recognised that learning was a step to an ultimate goal. They were interested in vocational, practical courses, such as construction, hair and beauty, childcare and IT.

Only a small number of young people started the AA with **no specific focus** and this cluster simply wanted something to do¹. There was a greater tendency for this group to have complex barriers, and accordingly, they had frequently been recruited through Model 3. Many had started the AA for 'something to do'.

4.3 Routes into the AA

There were three primary routes into the AA. These were recommendation, direct recruitment and self-referral.

- **Recommendation.** These young people had heard about the AA from friends. Among young people on Model 3, the AA was often recommended to them through support agencies, such as groups for young mothers, social workers and a local youth club. *'[name] who runs the Young Mams' Group because I cannot get benefits because my partner works so she was telling us about AA and she said I could get it even though my partner was working. She said it would help a lot.'*

Young person recruited through Model 3

¹ This cluster had formed a larger proportion of the achieved sample in the previous programme research studies.

- **Outreach.** These young people had been directly recruited to the AA by Connexions advisers. Methods of outreach included telephone contact, letters, leaflet drops, and in one case, a home visit. Young people were enthusiastic about the AA and were impressed that someone was getting in touch.

'Well, Connexions like, contacted me, like, because we had interviews with them and stuff at school and since they knew I hadn't been doing anything because I'd left college and then they just phoned me up and like, called me in and gave me information about it.'

Young person recruited through Model 1a

- **Self-referral.** This encompassed young people already in contact with Connexions. They had looked for help and advice. If they were eligible for AA (or soon would be), the mainstream Connexions advisers described the AA and encouraged them to pursue a place.

'I was in Connexions in [area] and they told me about it. It was because I'd applied for a make-up course in April, and I'd gone to Connexions, because I was getting nowhere with it.'

Young person recruited through Model 2

4.3.1 Reasons to join the AA

Young people gave multiple reasons for joining the AA and rarely one aspect of the AA offer was identified in isolation as a sole reason for joining. The most common reason for joining the AA was that it gave the young person something to do and having choice over what they would do on the programme was an important factor. Underpinning this, young people understood that their activities would help them achieve their goals.

'But in total I think it's been a good range of activities because I've been offered a lot. There's always been something that's been brought up. I like the feeling that it's actually my choice and not theirs, if I want to do it or not. So if I feel like I don't want to do this or if I do want to do it, I can choose. I think it's really good.'

Young person recruited through Model 2

'I just thought it would help with my confidence. By the end of it I will have a bank account with a job. So I have a new birth certificate. Just with everything she's helping, like if I needed anything I just popped in.'

Young person recruited through Model 3

The incentive was the most frequently mentioned linked reason to join the AA. The increased amount of weekly payment, which was on offer in some pilot areas, appeared to be an important change, since some young people felt on a par with friends at college that were in receipt of EMA.

The social interaction offered by the AA was also an attraction, and young people reported that it gave them a chance to meet new people. For some, joining the AA had relieved the pressure from parents to be 'doing something'.

Table 4.1 draws together these reasons into those most prevalent for each of the Pilot 2 AA models.

Table 4.1 - Attraction to joining the AA based on model

Model	Importance of Attraction to AA		
	Primary	Secondary	Additional
1a (13 weeks)	Something to do	Incentive Opportunity to try new things	Company / expanding peer groups Relieve parental pressure
1b (20 weeks)	Something to do	Help and support Opportunities to try new things Incentive	Company / expanding peer groups Relieve parental pressure
2 (EMA drop-out)	Help and support	Incentive Something to do Opportunities to try new things	Company / expanding peer groups
3 (vulnerable groups)	Help and support Something to do	Incentive Opportunities to try new things	Company / expanding peer groups Positive activities to encourage / sustain good behaviour

Source: IES/CEI 2009

4.4 The activities

Each of the Local Authority areas had a group of AA core activities operating on a regular basis, in addition to bespoke and individualised activities that would be organised at the request of young people. These encompassed the full range of activities envisaged by DCSF (see Table 4.1). This framework is used to explore the activities that young people completed. It should be noted that activity programmes did not vary particularly by model, although there were some differences between the local authority areas.

4.4.1 Core activities

Engagement. This was principally covered through the adviser meetings and included discussion of the young person's aims, and their barriers to reaching their goals (or to developing goals).

Development. Literacy and numeracy skills development was the most common of the development activities across the three local authority areas.

Personal Development. There were some 'fun' activities that served to improve social skills such as teamwork, confidence building and communication. These included gym memberships, health-related opportunities such as smoking cessation workshops, and physical activities such as assault courses or zip wires.

Study Skills. There were a number of certificated courses young people completed including health and safety, first aid and forklift licences (although young people had to demonstrate commitment before the forklift courses would be paid for).

Employability Skills. Many core activities focused on employability skills. These included interview techniques, CV development, and job search and application techniques.

Exit Activities. These activities were focused on support with applications to colleges and for jobs. These were mainly delivered through the adviser meetings.

4.1.1 Individualised activities

Individualised activities also covered the six types within the framework. However, some were more varied since participation depended upon young people's particular needs. Some undertook college tasters to assess their interest in a training goal. There was also evidence of work placements although these were, overall, unusual. Other examples included language courses such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for a new immigrant and Spanish, for a young person interested in working abroad. A Sign Language qualification was arranged for a young mother whose child was hearing impaired. The most vulnerable young people, including those recruited through Model 3, needed more specialist personal development such as anger management, and courses for expectant mothers and young parents.

4.5 Working with an adviser

At its simplest, young people understood that it was through the weekly meeting, that their progress would be charted and their incentive payment would be agreed. Only a small group of young people saw this as the sole value of the meeting.

'That's when they made sure you did the weekly tasks so that they can sign you off and say that you've done it and then you get the money.'

Young person recruited through Model 3

Many more young people saw the meeting as developmental. It was apparent that the meetings provided the individualisation to which the AA aspires. The analysis suggested some key facets that made them successful.

- **Treated as an adult.** This was the most important factor in the adviser–young person relationship. While young people were happy to accept the deal (something for something), what had encouraged them to keep their agreement, was that they felt respected as an individual. Examples of this included young people feeling that the weekly meeting time was negotiated rather than it was imposed and advisers set out the reasons why doing a task or activity might be important.

Some young people recognised that their personal challenges impacted on their relationships with adults. In one example, a young person felt their adviser was more sensitised and more willing to adapt to their needs, than other agencies.

'In the jobcentre they said I'm a waste of time ... so I was upset and then she [adviser] kept like ringing and if I didn't go in that day, she wouldn't phone – she'd wait until I calmed down. And when she made appointments and I never went, like with different people, she didn't get angry. I was surprised.'

Young person recruited through Model 3

- **Motivation, keeping time and pace up.** The adviser meetings acted as a motivator to engage in tasks and activities. For some, the relationship centred on someone being there to nudge them forward, so that they would start making decisions, and moving towards a goal. Some young people felt that without their advisers, they would not have achieved as much as they had.

'I think it's [the meeting is] good because it gets me motivated to do things because I'm not a motivated person, so I need someone to push me along, and she [the adviser] helps me do it.'

Young person recruited through Model 1b

- **Supporting problems and difficulties beyond the AA.** In a number of instances, the adviser had supported young people's wider problems (family relationships, health and well-being, and living arrangements).

'When I was just upset about me dad, he [adviser] just helped me.'

Young person recruited through Model 1a, and Model 3 for his second AA

- **Providing information, advice and guidance.** Young people appreciated someone who would explore their aspirations, and consider different ways of achieving them. Through this process young people developed the confidence to attempt the next step.

'She [my adviser] was giving me ideas because like before I didn't really know where to look for jobs and I didn't really know what to do. It's like she gives us more confidence really to go into places and ask if they're looking for staff.'

Young person recruited through Model 3

- **Time and focus.** For the duration of the meeting, young people knew they would be the focus on their adviser's attention. It was apparent that many had not received this kind of attention for some time, if at all. This time and focus was particularly appreciated by some of the most vulnerable young people.

'He [adviser] was mint, he was just helping me with everything. He made you feel like you were his main priority all of the time, he was constantly like, we'll get this job, we'll try for this job, we'll try for this one, until my half hour was up. He didn't waste a minute, honestly.'

Young person recruited through Model 3

4.6 Early and longer term outcomes

4.6.1 Early outcomes

The early outcomes accorded with the previous evaluation findings¹. This research indicated that a range of activities was likely to be required to support young people to enable them to progress and overcome barriers, but that **confidence** was the key underpinning outcome of the AA. This was borne out in the current research, and confidence was reported as an outcome by young people in both first and second stage interviews.

'It gets you more confidence, helps you meet new people, we get independent and you don't need anyone, you can do things on your own It just gives you more courage just to get up and go rather than just sitting in the house and being bored.'

Young person recruited through Model 2

¹ Newton, B., Levesley, T., Oakley, J., Fearn, H. and Johnson, C. (2009) *Activity and Learning Agreement Pilots Programme Theory Evaluation; Activity Agreements and Small Step Progression*, Working Paper 5 DCSF-RR098; also Tanner, E., Purdon, S., D'Souza, J. and Finch, S. (2009) *Activity Agreement Pilots Quantitative Evaluation* DCSF-RR096.

Other early and intermediate outcomes identified by young people showed the role of the AA in helping them to **develop choices** about their future. The opportunity to experiment in the safe environment of the AA was greatly appreciated. This enabled young people to make informed decisions about their future goals, which might include changing their plan if they found out their original goal would not be suitable.

'I'm glad I actually got to try going to college for the day to see what it was like because I could have just applied for college and went and not liked it. With Connexions, I could have a trial day. It was a trial for four weeks. She said I could put you on, because I went the first week and I didn't like it, so I never got to do the four weeks.'

Young person recruited through Model 1b

Some young people recognised that **establishing a routine**, and developing improved time management was an important soft outcome from their AA. During periods of inactivity, some young people had become entrenched in a 'night owl' routine and could see no reason to change. Through the AA, a significant shift in their behaviour was achieved, and they returned to hours of living that would enable their progression to a positive destination.

'I think it's really good that they're getting us back into a routine of going out and doing something, instead of just sitting at home... Before I was doing it [the AA] I was going to bed at six in the morning and getting up at five o'clock at night. When I started doing this, it just got me my days back and my sleep back. It got everything back to normal and it's really helped.'

Young person recruited through Model 1a

The AA was also recognised as having promoted **personal development**. This had emerged as a result of the gentle pressure exerted by advisers to attend meetings and activities. It also emerged from the activities they had engaged in, and through the recognition of their achievements by their adviser. In some cases, this had led to a major attitudinal shift, with young people realising their own role and responsibility in achieving a positive destination.

'[The AA] helped me grow... just realising that you've got to do stuff yourself and not wait for it to come to you. A job's not going to come to you, you've got to go and get it ... so like this job, I'm clinging onto it because he [employer] says he wants his work running for as long as I want to work. I can stop there as long as I want – he says I am good at what I do. So as long as he's happy with me, and I'm happy with the job, then I may as well stop with it.'

Young person recruited through Model 3

4.6.2 Longer term outcomes

Since the sample comprised young people at differing stages of their participation in AA, and the research approach was a small scale, qualitative study, a systematic analysis of the extent to which positive destinations were achieved and sustained cannot be provided. The interview data indicated a range of post-AA experiences. The most common destination achieved by young people was entering learning, with around four in ten either having started their course, or having a start-date agreed. One-third had returned to the NEET category. Around one-fifth had started work or training and a small number were volunteering, or had returned for a second AA. Some of the young people who were working had been accepted onto full-time courses and were waiting to start.

Young people entering education and training

Young people had started, or were about to start, a range of courses at different levels. Examples of learning included provision delivered by the voluntary and community sector which tended to be shorter term, and longer term courses and training delivered by private training providers and FE colleges. Young people in this group were taking courses aimed at supporting them to care for their children, in addition to basic and functional skills provision, which would support their progression in future.

Many of the young people in education saw their course as a stepping-stone to higher level learning in the future and / or getting a good job. It was clear that the experience of the AA had helped them formulate plans, and become aware of their ability to move forwards. This seemingly had the effect, when linked to their success in gaining a place on a course, of raising their aspirations.

'After this E2E you qualify to be a nursery assistant or a nursery nurse. After that if they keep us on I can go to university and be a proper teacher.'

Young person recruited through Model 2

However, it was still possible for young people to encounter barriers outside of their control, which meant their positive destination would not be sustained. For example, a young man who had progressed to training and who was near to completing his course, was informed by his provider that he would not be able to continue since the course was being closed. Young people who entered training following the AA, tended to have to be quite resilient to achieve their place. If they were offered a training place, providers expected them to find a work placement. In one example, a young woman had continued to be supported by her adviser following entry to training. When the provider did not assist with finding a placement, the adviser set up an interview with a more proactive provider and supported the young woman to gain an employer placement.

Young people entering work

Most young people in this group had started low-paid, low-skilled work. For many, the job was a temporary position. However, most young people hoped to be offered a permanent job. A few were receiving in-house training. There was a growing realisation among young people who were working, and many of those who had returned to NEET following the AA, that the current economic climate was limiting their work opportunities. For some in work, this meant they were more inclined to stick with it.

Young people who leave AA and return to NEET

Differences emerged between young people who had returned to the NEET group following their AA. Some **still lacked a clear goal** for their future and were considering whether to apply for learning or seek a job. While they had achieved some development as part of the AA, it appeared that some, often the most vulnerable, would have benefited from an extended experience. Their AA experience had comprised a substantial engagement period, which meant that less time had been available to focus on developing learning or work goals.

'It's not really helped me to decide what I want to do or anything like that. But it's like they help you, write your CV and things, so in that way it's helped.'

Young person recruited through Model 1a

The second group had a clear focus for instance, they hoped to enter training. However, **they faced stiff competition** for a place, and to date had not been successful. Some planned to seek work as a stopgap while they continued to apply for training.

Others had more **significant barriers** to their progress, for instance young mothers who did not feel ready to progress until their child was older. This group had a clearer focus, it was more a case of needing a longer period to realise their goals.

A small group had **health problems**, and one or two were claiming Incapacity Benefit by the time of the follow-up interview. Their future progression into work or learning appeared uncertain.

Some young people who returned to NEET **had achieved a positive destination, although it had not been sustained**. For some, the difficulty surrounded their attitude to work and a need for greater experimentation prior to committing to a job. If they did not like a job once they started it, they saw no reason to continue working. For others, it was more a case that their circumstances changed in some way, which made it difficult for them to achieve or sustain the positive outcome (see section 4.1.1).

Sustained contact with advisers

There were numerous examples of young people maintaining some level of contact with their adviser beyond their AA. While the extent of their contact was often limited, it still represented progress since many had been isolated from services and support prior to the AA. This emphasised the critical role of advisers in gaining the trust and respect of young people.

For a small group of young people, more proactive support and follow-up might have been beneficial. In one example, a young person had started work following the AA but had struggled to get there on time because it was some distance from her home and she was reliant on public transport. She was unable to cope and left. She did not re-contact her adviser as she felt she had let her down.

4.7 Satisfaction and improvements

The large majority of young people were highly satisfied with their experience of the AA. They understood the AA had been an opportunity to do something, through which they had developed confidence and motivation.

The satisfaction level of a small group was influenced by their lack of success in getting a job. This group had entered the AA with an aim to find employment. While they recognised that the AA had been beneficial in terms of soft outcomes and gaining experience and accreditation, it had not led to work and this was a disappointment.

'She [the adviser] was helpful but there was just nothing there for me really. I didn't want to go back to training. That's what they mainly offered me, going back to training, because that was all on the Connexions boards. There were no jobs coming through really.'

Young person recruited through Model 2

To improve the AA, a significant number of young people suggested that activities could be more work focused and include a greater emphasis on interview skills, as well as work tasters and placements. This reflects their feedback about their activity programmes and may be an effect of the growing awareness of the challenges they face in the economic downturn.

A smaller group felt that more frequent adviser meetings would be beneficial. This view tended to be held by young people with vulnerabilities.

While most young people were not greatly aware of the different AA models, one or two suggested that the recruitment window for Model 2 was too short. They felt they needed more time to assess if the AA would be the right option for them.

4.8 Conclusions

- The qualitative analysis of interviews with young people suggested that the **AA was an effective tool for re-engaging young people**. It supported young people, offered them choices and development and they recognised their confidence and motivation had increased. Where positive outcomes were achieved, young people were able to identify the contribution of the AA.
- The **adviser-broker support was a crucial element**, especially for the most vulnerable young people, but it worked in conjunction with the incentive (to validate participation) and activities (to challenge, reward and develop young people).
- **Work outcomes primarily led to low-quality jobs**, frequently without training. Some young people used work as a stopgap to progression to learning and training
- **Not all young people stayed in their positive destinations** but there were reasons for this. These included barriers linked to infrastructure (training/college places not available, course closures), changes in young people's situations (moving home, thrown out of home), and wider barriers such as ill-health.
- Some **young parents were unable to progress beyond AA** due to their circumstances. While the AA can build capacity to progress, it cannot in itself create progression routes. This requires much greater flexibility within the learning infrastructure and a much deeper understanding of the youth labour market.

5 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AA AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RPA

This chapter examines the effectiveness of AA delivery during Pilot 2, in terms of the extent to which it encourages a broader range of young people who were classified as NEET, to participate in, and to achieve, positive outcomes from the programme. It goes on to explore the lessons learnt from Pilot 2 which may help to inform policy planning and development in relation to the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA).

5.1 Opening out AA entry - did it work?

The introduction of earlier and more flexible entry points into AAs was welcomed in all pilot areas. The implementation of Pilot 2 was a positive response to feedback¹, which had suggested that the previous eligibility criteria of 20+ weeks spent NEET, was too long a period of time to wait for some young people. Pilot 2 had enabled greater numbers of young people to enter the programme and offered a strategy for earlier intervention. While Pilot 2 did not achieve its projected profile of starters, this was largely attributable to the introduction of Model 2, where 27 per cent of profile was achieved. The following key lessons were learnt:

- Model 1a enabled NEET young people to access intervention at 13 weeks and, in many cases, this group was easier to move into EET outcomes, as they were not entrenched in inactivity. Over half of participants achieved a positive outcome immediately following their completion of the programme.
- Model 1b replicated Pilot 1 delivery, which allowed young people to enter AA after being NEET for 20+ weeks. No new lessons were learnt.
- Model 2 exposed the complexities of identifying and accessing post-16 drop-outs. This group of young people had not previously been a priority group, either within AA delivery or within Connexions mainstream delivery. Therefore, systems were not in place to support Model 2 implementation, in particular with regard to the development of efficient referral systems between post-16 providers and Connexions services. In addition, the tight restrictions surrounding entry criteria made delivery largely unworkable - that is, a young person could start an AA if they had not secured a future start date in EET by week 5 and if no more than eight weeks had elapsed since notification of their drop-out had been received. Some pilot areas reported that, while greater intervention with post-16 drop-outs was urgently needed, insufficient time was given to develop implementation and delivery strategies before a decision was taken to suspend Model 2. This model achieved the highest proportion of EET outcomes, although participation figures were low.
- Model 3 offered AA 'on demand' to vulnerable groups of young people, after they satisfied a nominal eligibility period (six weeks). It provided the forerunner to Pilot 3 delivery, which is operating in 2009/10, by identifying the key challenges encountered when working with young people with often complex needs. In particular, it highlighted that a number of different strategies were needed to access and to work successfully with specific vulnerable groups. For example, while inter-agency working enabled Connexions staff to link to groups such as young offenders and teenage parents, other vulnerable groups, such as travellers or young carers, had little interaction with statutory services. In addition, the multiple and complex needs of some young people made Model 3 a demanding programme to deliver in terms of staff time and morale. The issues facing some young people could not be addressed successfully in a 20-

¹ Maguire, S., Thompson, J., Hillage, J., Dewson, S., Miller, L., Johnson, C., Newton, B., Bates, P. and Page, R. (2009) *Activity Agreement Pilots Process Evaluation*, DCSF-RR095.

week programme, and this also made achieving EET destinations much more difficult. Model 3 also largely failed to support many young people on benefits such as JSA and IS, since their inclusion on the programme on an 'agreement only' basis could not be counted within AA pilot area targets, and therefore acted as a disincentive to engage with high proportions of young people from this group.

At the early stages of the extension pilot, the existence of multiple entry points onto the programme, with variations between different groups of young people, made it more difficult for some Connexions staff, local stakeholders and young people to understand the AA eligibility criteria. This is a key finding, in terms of designing a programme for national implementation.

While the demand for more flexible entry onto AAs had been met through the introduction of the new delivery models, there continued to be a need for delivery staff to be able to extend some young people's length of stay on the programme in certain circumstances. It was widely asserted that AA is now a well-known and established programme in most localities. However, young people who entered AAs, retained their NEET status, while participating on the programme which meant that participation in AA did not directly contribute to reducing NEET statistics in the short term, unlike other programmes. This issue needs to be addressed for any future national rollout of the programme, as it may act as a disincentive to Connexions staff to refer young people.

While the introduction of the Pilot 2 had increased the potential to recruit a greater number of young people who were NEET onto AAs, in some areas demand from young people could not be met, due to large caseload sizes, staff turnover and staff shortages. There was a clear demand for early notification about the future of AAs, in order that pilot managers could retain/increase both staffing levels and their skill base among existing personnel.

5.2 Value for money

Respondents (except young people) were asked if they felt that the AA pilots offered value for money. While the costs of delivery were unknown to them, the vast majority of respondents were extremely positive about the initiative in terms of its unique approach and its contribution to reducing social exclusion and disengagement, which they viewed could not be delivered without bearing enhanced costs.

'The challenge ... is trying to get the message across to government ministers that this particular group ... it does cost a lot of money And they've got to say well compared to giving them a chance and put that money in, we could just write them off ... because kids that come out of 13 years of statutory education without five A to Cs... that's appalling We've got schools in (name of area) where 75 per cent of kids left school that didn't have an English or Maths GCSE. Seventy-five per cent talk about value for money there It's unbelievable isn't it.'

Connexions Area Manager

The definition of what constitutes value for money within AA delivery was also widely challenged.

'So for 20 weeks at £30 a week, plus some activities, most of which, as I say we do for nowt or we get for nowt. I would say it's a pretty good deal and yes OK you do have to invest a bit of cash in some personnel but I still think that's pretty good value for money.'

Connexions Head of Service

The AA model of offering a financial incentive, intensive support and individualised learning was considered to be successful and one which was being replicated in many local authority areas. One LA senior manager described how the area intended to introduce its own local AA if the pilot was not rolled out nationally, although the critical challenge it faced was being able to match the financial incentive that was currently offered within the AA package. There was also a weight of evidence from interviews with both Connexions staff and providers that the piloting of AA had 'led the way' in terms of developing new ways to access and deliver provision which offered a much greater focus on meeting the needs of individual learners. Again, this approach was being mirrored within the design of other local and national programmes, most notably ESF funded courses, targeted at the NEET group.

A degree of frustration was felt about the performance of AA being measured largely in relation to achieving EET outcomes, when it was felt that supporting many young people to make positive transitions may take far longer than a 20-week period, given some of the barriers they faced.

'The Treasury puts it as it's value for money if you get young people to a Level 2. Well, I'm sorry but the young person who left school with no qualifications is not going necessarily to reach a level 2 qualification in five months. That doesn't make it bad value for money. It means that it's the terms of reference for how you're defining whether it's value for money are not appropriate for what we're trying to provide.'

Personal Adviser

5.3 Implications for the raising of the participation age

The AA pilots were introduced prior to the decision being made to raise the participation age (RPA) for continuing in learning for all 17 year olds from 2013 and for all 18 year olds from 2015. If this goal is to be achieved, strategies will need to be in place to support retention in learning, especially of young people who are at risk of becoming or who become NEET. The AA pilots offered the opportunity to test the effectiveness of using a combination of three measures, namely financial incentives, intensive support and individualised learning to re-engage the NEET group. Some key lessons were learnt to inform policy development during the first two years of the pilot, which were outlined in the final process evaluation report¹. In summary, these were:

- **Financial incentives** were an effective tool for engaging young people and rewarding their participation. Money often acts as the initial 'hook'.
- **Intensive support** was instrumental in the delivery of AAs. Low caseloads had enabled PAs to engage with young people on a regular basis and to establish positive relationships, which had ensured young people's continued engagement with a support agency such as Connexions, as well as their sustained participation within the programme.
- **Individualised learning programmes** enabled young people, in consultation with their advisers, to design bespoke packages of learning. While this approach ran the risk of allowing young people to choose inappropriate and expensive options, the evidence suggested that practical, relevant and cost-effective options were in place.

¹ Maguire, S., Thompson, J., Hillage, J., Dewson, S., Miller, L., Johnson, C., Newton, B., Bates, P. and Page, R. (2009) *Activity Agreement Pilots Process Evaluation* DCSF-RR095.

Evidence from the evaluation of Pilot 2 reinforces earlier findings. The introduction of multiple points of entry into AA and the targeting of AA programmes towards specific sub-groups within the NEET population, most notably vulnerable groups and post-16 early leavers, also delivers some key questions and answers to help inform policy development. These are:

5.4 Who do you target since they all have needs?

Pilot 2 reinforced most research evidence on the NEET group, which shows that the population is diverse and a 'one size fits all' engagement model simply will not work.

- Earlier intervention is successful in achieving positive outcomes among young people without complex needs.
- Model 2 showed that input is needed to support post-16 early leavers, although current systems are not sufficiently functional to identify the population.
- Through the implementation of Model 3, it was evident that vulnerable groups cannot be classified as a homogeneous population, as they comprise a number of sub-groups, which often have differing needs.

The expanded eligible population that resulted from the implementation of Pilot 2, showed that a rolled out version of this model might mean that financial constraints could result in a low caseload threshold offering intensive support becoming unsustainable. This would severely undermine the AA delivery model. Conversely, by concentrating on the most vulnerable groups, which is the operational model within Pilot 3, continuing to offer intensive support becomes more feasible. However, there is a risk that a significant proportion of the NEET population are simply left to 'fend for themselves' within mainstream services. Pilot 2 evaluation evidence suggests that the number of young people in this group is currently growing, due to the recession, diminishing number of job opportunities and the increasing competition for post-16 education and training places. It could be argued that this group forms the 'silent and hidden majority' within the NEET group, since they are still living at home and are, in the majority of cases, neither entitled to benefits nor classified as vulnerable. Early and short-term AA type intervention appears to offer a way forward for this group of young people.

'We're now in a position to support those vulnerable groups in the extreme long-term NEET, but in the middle those ones that might have just made it with a little bit of extra nudge, now those are the ones the net has disappeared for.'

Connexions Manager

'They sit just below the radar ... they're the ones that really need to have a lot of support, because nobody's actually giving them anything, whereas the drug users are getting other agency involvement'

Connexions Manager

Another key message for the RPA is to ensure that a strategy is in place not only to ensure that young people participate in learning, but also that support exists for young people who drop out. The operation of Model 2 exposed severe problems in terms of accessing and supporting early leavers. There needs to be much tighter regulation concerning the notification of early leavers, as well as the development of guidance services which have much closer working links with post-16 education and training providers, so that young people can be identified and helped at a much earlier stage.

5.5 How do you get mainstream providers to change their behaviour?

One of the most significant achievements within the operation of the AA pilots was the ability to secure provision which adapted to the needs of individual learners. This was largely delivered through harnessing the support of voluntary and private sector training providers, which proved to be more flexible and responsive. While some inroads were made in terms of encouraging large providers, namely colleges, to change their behaviour by offering more tailored provision to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse group of learners, there was overwhelming evidence to support the case that there was still a long way to go. Flexibility required changes to course content, where provision was offered and when it was offered. Too many young people's transitions into both education and training still rested on full-time or part-time course provision which had September starts. While the RPA will introduce compulsory learning among all 17 and 18 year olds, the piloting of AA demonstrated that the existing standard post-16 offer will not meet the needs of the whole population of learners, nor will all young people be willing to participate and succeed within mainstream education and training.

'Well it is a key policy question, particularly with the raising of the leaving age ... I think it does plug a gap (AA), in that there is a group of young people who ... whatever the mainstream opportunities that are out there, be it employment, be it training, be it education, are likely to fail, unless they have something in place which deals with their issues, if you like and in a proactive and positive way. Because that's a good thing about the AA. It's not just sitting in front of somebody and pouring your heart out. It's a bit about that obviously but it is about, right, get up and do something.'

Connexions Head of Service

'Just because you change the rules doesn't make people abide by them. There are going to be people that, for one reason and another, be it genuine, that they've made the wrong decision and they're genuinely unhappy and want help, or that they just don't want to do it. They're not just going to magically stay at school because that's the rule.'

Connexions Personal Adviser

5.6 How do you measure success?

Outcomes from AA participation have been largely measured by the rates of progression into EET. The proportions of young people entering EET have been captured at two points: immediate progression after young people complete AA; and at 13-weeks post-AA participation (for those returning to NEET following their AA). Data from Pilot 2 showed that EET entry rates varied between delivery models. This indicates that early intervention (Model 1a) and recent participation in education or training (Model 2) increase young people's propensity to secure an EET outcome, while later intervention (Model 1b) and belonging to a vulnerable group (Model 3) reduce the chances of EET outcomes. Findings from Pilot 2 pointed to a widespread concern among respondents about the extent to which the success of AA was measured by achieving EET outcomes. Moreover, one of the contradictions that existed within that measure concerned young people who completed AA and progressed into jobs without training (JWT). They were classified as achieving a positive outcome, yet the JWT group itself is widely considered to represent a problematic status, given the lack of accredited learning and training opportunities that may exist.

The lack of emphasis placed on soft outcomes achieved within AA in measuring outcomes from the programme at national level, was widely criticised, given the nature of the client group to which AA was targeted. It was felt that AA was successful in pioneering personal development opportunities (PDOs) and sustained contact with support services, which

provided the groundwork for future progression and that these achievements were largely overlooked. Moreover, it could be argued that by placing an increasing emphasis on offering accreditation within AA activities and improving EET outcomes within Pilot 2 and 3 delivery, this ran the risk of pushing AA towards a standard delivery model which the pilot had been set up to avoid.

Data from Pilot 2 showed, unsurprisingly, that vulnerable groups achieved the lowest proportion of EET outcomes. The focus on AA delivery to vulnerable groups within Pilot 3 therefore questions the validity of continuing to use a hard outcome measure to demonstrate the success or otherwise of the AA pilot. If these criteria alone are applied, the pilot is 'doomed to fail'. At the same time, the AA offer of early intervention has been withdrawn from the majority of the NEET population, where clear inroads, in terms of achieving positive outcomes, had been achieved.

'The "quietly suffering kids" are over-looked by the vulnerable group categories – those who lack the self-esteem and confidence and who spiral, unnoticed into mental health problems. This includes those that become isolated within their own communities, where intergenerational unemployment and cultural travel boundaries apply.'

Connexion Local Manager

5.7 Conclusion

- At the early stages of the extension pilot, the existence of **multiple entry points** onto the programme, with variations between different groups of young people, made it more difficult for some Connexions staff, local stakeholders and young people to understand the AA eligibility criteria. This is a key finding, in terms of designing a programme for national implementation.
- **Model 2** exposed the complexities of identifying and accessing post-16 drop-outs. This group of young people had not previously been a priority group, either within AA delivery or within Connexions mainstream delivery. Therefore, systems were not in place to support Model 2 implementation, in particular with regard to the development of efficient referral systems between post-16 providers and Connexions services.
- It was widely asserted that AA is now a **well-known and established programme** in most localities.
- There was a clear demand for early notification about the **future of AAs**, in order that pilot managers could retain/increase both staffing levels and their skill base among existing personnel.
- A degree of frustration was felt about the performance of AA being measured largely in relation to achieving **EET outcomes**, when it was felt that supporting many young people to make positive transitions may take far longer than a 20-week period, given some of the barriers they faced.
- By concentrating on the most **vulnerable groups**, which is the operational model within Pilot 3, there is a risk that a significant proportion of the NEET population will be simply left to 'fend for themselves' within mainstream services. Pilot 2 evaluation evidence suggests that the number of young people in this group is currently growing, due to the recession, diminishing number of job opportunities and the increasing competition for post-16 education and training places.

- The piloting of AA has demonstrated that the **existing standard post-16** offer will not meet the needs of the whole population of learners, post 2013, nor will all young people be willing to participate and succeed within mainstream education and training provision.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Evidence from the evaluation of Pilot 2 reinforces earlier findings¹ which reported that the AA is widely perceived to be a programme 'with a difference', with its innovative approach of offering intensive support, financial incentives and individualised programmes of learning, to help re-engage young people who have become NEET. The programme had become embedded within the localities in which it operated and while there were other local initiatives targeted at the NEET group, they were reported to complement rather than to compete with AA delivery. The only drawback which AA faced was that young people who participated on the programme, in the majority of cases, remained classified as NEET. The pressure that most LAs faced in terms of reducing their NEET targets meant that some staff had to seek alternative options for some young people.

The piloting of AA has had an impact on the delivery of education and training provision, in terms of achieving far greater flexibility in terms of what is delivered, where it is delivered and how it is delivered. This was largely achieved by working with private and voluntary sector providers that were willing to adapt their procedures to meet the needs of individual learners. There was evidence that other programmes, such as ESF programmes, were beginning to adopt more creative approaches to delivery.

'... it's all about having the young person there and wanting to work with the young person, not saying, we're a provider who's going to do this and you've got to fit in.'

Connexions Manager

Within Pilot 2 delivery, there was evidence that delivery staff were trying to both secure more qualification accreditation as part of AA run programmes and to access more provision that was largely funded through other sources eg LA run courses. Interviews with young people confirmed that AA provision met their needs, in the majority of cases. They also valued the intensive support that they received from PAs.

In pilot areas where the weekly AA financial allowance was raised to £30 per week as part of Pilot 2 arrangements, the increase was welcomed. It also equated to the maximum EMA entitlement, which was a well-known 'brand' and young people recognised the allowance as being a form of financial support that they might be able to continue to claim if they moved onto education and training.

The introduction of the new delivery models within Pilot 2 had broadened out entry to AA and offered earlier intervention points. In some areas, the expanded AA population placed additional pressure on staffing and in some cases AA waiting lists were in evidence. Increasingly, pilot areas moved towards tiered staffing arrangements, which involved PAs, or equivalent grades of staffing, concentrating their efforts on engaging and supporting young people and less qualified staff managing tasks such as the brokering of AA provision and dealing with the administration of, for example, transport arrangements and payment queries.

'But come November when all the school leavers joined, we actually attached a mentor to do a lot of the running round and the picking up and dropping off ... that relieved a bit of pressure from the PAs, which has worked really well.'

Connexions Manager

¹ Maguire, S., Thompson, J., Hillage, J., Dewson, S., Miller, L., Johnson, C., Newton, B., Bates, P. and Page, R. (2009) *Activity Agreement Pilots Process Evaluation* DCSF-RR095

The extension to the eligible population which resulted from the opening out of the NEET eligibility period for AA entry, brought with it the opportunity for AA staff in most pilot areas to offer earlier intervention to young people in the NEET group and to work with new cohorts of clients, such as young people who had recently dropped out of learning (Model 2). Moving away from the standard NEET 20-week entry criteria also introduced new peaks and troughs in terms of entry points to the programme.

Delivery of Model 2 proved the most challenging, which is reflected in the low take-up figures. However, this should not conclude that there is not a critical need to engage with and support young people who become NEET, after dropping out of learning. Systems were simply not in place to support the delivery of Model 2, in particular with regard to the development of efficient referral systems between post-16 providers and Connexions services. In addition, the tight restrictions surrounding entry criteria made delivery largely unworkable ie the 5-8 week rule. Linking AA payments to a young person's previous EMA entitlement was also difficult. In some cases, young people's circumstances had changed, while in other instances, they felt disadvantaged in comparison to their counterparts who had accessed AA through other delivery models, where income assessment was not a prior requirement. Some pilot areas reported that insufficient time was given to develop implementation and delivery strategies before a decision was taken to suspend Model 2.

Model 3 delivery highlighted that a number of different strategies were needed to access and to work successfully with specific vulnerable groups. AA was utilised to a much greater extent by other support agencies such as YOS and Social Services because of the reduction in the eligibility period to six weeks NEET, which meant that young people could be referred more quickly to the programme. However, it was widely acknowledged that the issues facing some young people could not be addressed successfully in a 20-week programme and that greater flexibility was needed on programme length. Model 3 also largely failed to support many young people on benefits such as JSA and IS, since it was reported that their inclusion on the programme, which was operated on an 'agreement only' basis, could not be counted within AA pilot area targets. Therefore, this often acted as a disincentive to engage with high proportions of young people from this group.

A degree of frustration was felt about the performance of AA being measured largely in relation to achieving EET outcomes, when it was felt that supporting many young people to make positive transitions may take far longer than a 20-week period, given some of the barriers they faced. The importance of measuring soft outcomes from AA was considered to be a crucial measure of success from AA, in particular, among young people from vulnerable groups, where immediate progression to education and training could be an unrealistic expectation, given the barriers to engagement, which needed to be overcome.

There are some key lessons from the piloting of AA in general and AA Pilot 2 in particular, which may help RPA planning. All three facets of the programme were integral to its delivery:

- **Financial incentives** were an effective tool for engaging young people and rewarding their participation.
- **Intensive support** was instrumental in the delivery of AAs and was highly valued by young people.
- **Individualised learning programmes** enabled young people, in consultation with their advisers, to design bespoke packages of learning. This made AA unique.

Pilot 2 showed that:

- **Earlier intervention** is successful in achieving positive outcomes among young people without complex needs.
- While input is needed, current systems are not sufficiently functional to identify and support **post-16 early leavers**.
- **Vulnerable groups** cannot be classified as a homogeneous population, as they comprise a number of sub-groups, which often have differing needs.
- By concentrating on the most vulnerable groups, which is the operational model within Pilot 3, there is a risk that the '**silent and hidden majority**' within the NEET group will be simply left within mainstream services. This group are mostly still living at home and are, in the majority of cases, neither entitled to benefits nor classified as vulnerable. Early and **short-term AA type intervention** appears to offer a way forward for this group of young people.
- With regard to provision, the piloting of AA has demonstrated that **the existing standard post-16 offer** will not meet the needs of the whole population of learners, post 2013, nor will all young people be willing to participate and succeed within mainstream education and training provision.
- Vulnerable groups achieved the lowest proportion of **EET outcomes**, which questions the validity of continuing to use a hard outcome measure to demonstrate the success or otherwise of the AA pilot. If these criteria alone are applied, then Pilot 3 is 'doomed to fail'. At the same time, the AA offer of early intervention has been withdrawn from the majority of the NEET population, where clear inroads, in terms of achieving positive outcomes, had been achieved.

The evaluation of Pilot 3 should:

- Continue to monitor the delivery of AA within individual LA control, since this was an area of concern.
- Determine the extent to which the reduction in entry points onto the programme makes implementation and understanding of AA more straightforward.
- Examine the extent to which, by concentrating on the most vulnerable groups, that the remaining NEET population is being supported or otherwise, by alternative programmes/intervention.
- Identify examples of innovative practice with regard to working with vulnerable groups of young people.
- Monitor the interaction between benefit receipt and AA participation rates.
- Gather evidence on the soft outcomes gained from AA participation, as well as EET destinations.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Local Authority Case Studies

Model 1a and 1b Delivery

Activity Agreement Model 1a and 1b (13 and 20 weeks NEET) provided the key focus for the case study, although Model 3 for vulnerable groups was also operated by this local authority. Model 1a was an extension of the original AA model, and tested earlier intervention at 13 weeks NEET while Model 1b continued to offer AAs to 20+ weeks NEET young people. While participating on the AA young people received £30 a week, subject to the completion of agreed activities, for a maximum of 20 weeks.

Context for delivery

The case study local authority was one of ten local authorities operating the AA within the pilot area and one of five that were already managing their Connexions service prior to the introduction of AA.

The local authority was a relatively prosperous borough within the pilot area. However, local employment was over-represented by low-skilled occupations and a high proportion of residents commuted out of the borough to work. The local labour market tended to include a large number of young people in jobs without training (JWT) due to a high proportion of small employers. Consequently, entry to JWT was a fairly prominent destination for AA young people. However, since the economic downturn, the number of AA participants moving into employment was reported to have declined dramatically.

The delivery of AA across the ten local authority areas, was managed centrally by the AA project manager. Each local authority area had its own AA coordinator. The case study local authority opted to appoint a dedicated team of three AA advisers. Individual Connexions services in the pilot area are responsible for the appointment and management of their own staff.

The case study project coordinator supported PAs to assess and source activities. Providers included the Youth Service, Adult Education, private providers, training providers such as Rathbone and Alliance Learning, and community support organisations such as 'Groundwork'.

The AA benefited from reciprocal links with Adult Education and the Youth Service which offered free provision and services to the AA team, which also helped to support the local authority's NEET strategy. For instance, the Youth Service offered free use of their minibuses to transport young people to activities, support from youth workers during AA activities, and accepted young people on AA onto youth service led activities, free of charge. Activities offered in the case study area tended to focus on a mixture of recreational activities and short courses in skills development, such as literacy and numeracy, catering and health awareness programmes. There was an emphasis on confidence building / team building activities, which was a deliberate strategy in the local design and delivery of AA and focused on activities which were intended to act as a 'hook' to engage young people in personal development.

Participation in AA was based on the completion of a 20-week programme, although some young people made positive transitions at an earlier stage or left the programme. The first four weeks mainly involved signing up, settling in and completing paperwork and participating in a small number of activities. Between week 4 and week 15, the majority of a young person's individual programme of activities would take place. Finally, from week 15 onwards, an exit interview would be organised together with the planning of next steps.

On completion of their AA, young people that did not make immediate transitions to education, employment or training were referred back to their Connexions PA for follow-on support.

Perspectives of key stakeholders

Key stakeholders felt that the AA provided a valuable option and filled a gap in provision for young people who were not ready to progress to formal learning. The local Connexions service was planning to include some elements of the AA within its NEET strategy, in terms of offering intensive support and bespoke provision to help re-engage disaffected young people. Stakeholders agreed that an AA-style of approach had a role to play in the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) agenda.

'... unless mainstream learning providers have a very different approach to things, come 2013, that they will be able to meet the needs of all young people without them dropping out. You know? We're talking about young people who would, probably a lot of them would, quite cheerfully drop out at 14, let alone at 17. And some younger. So if you're going to sustain their interest, then I would argue ... [you need] this type of provision.'

Local Manager, Connexions

Some stakeholders suggested that the AA complements other NEET initiatives. For example, the AA acted as a stepping-stone to E2E, and young people accessed 'Positive Activities for Young People' through AA completion. However, the economic downturn had adversely affecting outcomes from AA. For example, the reduction in the number of young people moving into employment had put pressure on E2E provision. Young people who had completed AA and wished to move onto E2E had to wait, due to over subscription to local provision.

Most stakeholders agreed that there were no discernable differences in behaviour or motivation between young people who entered AA via the 13-week or 20-week models. The introduction of Model 1a had created little change in terms of young people's length of stay on AA, their demands for provision, or rates of positive outcomes. However, views about the impact of the 13-week eligibility model on young people's levels of motivation were contradictory.

'I think dropping the weeks NEET for eligibility from 20 to 13 certainly enabled us to pick up young people that were more motivated. So they were the ones that had just left doing something, and were ready to maintain that, and carry that on. Saying that, though, by the time a young person got to 20 weeks NEET, if they wanted to do something, they will feel that they've tried everything they could, and they'd reached the end of their tether, and they were willing to try anything.'

AA Project Coordinator

Young people were extremely positive about their AAs. The benefits they identified were increased self-purpose, raised self-confidence and the opportunity to acquire new skills and interests. Young people had gained confidence through taking part in activities and meeting new people, both activity deliverers and other young people. Many reported that the AA had helped them to establish a routine into their lives. The negotiated agreement was another element they valued highly. Many stated that they enjoyed their activities, partly because they 'had a say' in what they did.

Young people welcomed the regular support from their adviser. This support ranged from advice and information tailored to meet their interests, goals or circumstances. Some young people described how they were enabled to explore options beyond activities that were readily available and that their ideas and aspirations were supported. For example, one young person described how they had been encouraged to pursue their ambition to become a teacher and another mentioned the support they had received to follow their less conventional idea of training in tattoo art.

Most young people thought that the financial incentive, one-to-one support and negotiated activities, were all equally important and should not be changed. A few thought that the interaction with the adviser was more important, although they acknowledged the importance of the other two elements. Suggestions for improvements from young people, other than raising the incentive level, were few and largely individualised. However, some young people suggested that the AA should include more work-related activities.

Examples of innovative practice

Erica left school in June 2007 with eight GCSEs in the A*–C range. She went on to 6th form college for nearly a year but dropped out because she did not like the environment. She then started a hairdressing apprenticeship but this came to an end when the employer's business closed down. Erica decided that she didn't want to do another hairdressing apprenticeship: *'You just cleaned all day. So I didn't really learn anything'*. Instead she applied to the local FE College to do hairdressing. However, she did not gain a place as the course was already full.

Erica heard about the AA through a friend and decided to join as it would get her 'out of the house' and to give her an opportunity to 'try something new'. She was glad that she was able to join the AA at 13 weeks, rather than at 20 weeks: *'Twenty weeks is a long time of doing nothing'*.

Having completed her AA, Erica was working at a large retail employer while she waited to start a Teaching Assistants' course at the local FE College in September. She had hoped to get an apprenticeship but had to opt for FE as none were available. In the longer term, she hopes to progress, through university, to teaching. Erica's AA PA encouraged her to explore options beyond what was available or that she expected:

'Well I wanted to be a teacher in the first place and then obviously I wasn't at college so I thought it weren't possible and then.... [adviser], asked me what I really wanted to do, because when I said hairdressing and he said, "What do you really, really want to do?" I said, "I want to be a teacher", and he was like, "Oh, well you could still do it". (Name of adviser) gave me all the options.'

It was important to Erica that she saw the same adviser regularly as she got on well with him. She still visits him at Connexions from time to time. Erica felt that the AA had developed her confidence:

'It built my confidence up as well because I was like being with people all the time and meeting new people and stuff. So I was less shy when I was going for interviews.'

James left school in June 2007 with three GCSEs at 'C' or above (including Maths). He then went to college to do a BTEC in Engineering but left after nearly a year as he felt the course was not practical enough. Since leaving college, he has wanted to do hairdressing. He applied to the local College for September 2008 entry but did not get in - he found that he was too late as the course was full. Since that time, James had applied for numerous hairdressing apprenticeships with no success.

He heard about the AA through a friend so he decided he would 'give it a try'. He was attracted by the AA, since he would receive £30 while looking for work, at the same time as taking part in activities. He hoped it would get him 'out a bit' as well. He aimed to get a job as soon as possible. Having completed the AA, James managed to find a job in a café (JWT) which he planned to do until he could find 'something better'.

'I just walked past and they had a sign up saying staff wanted, I handed in my CV and then got an interview.'

Although James found the job himself, he thought that the AA provided him with the motivation and confidence to go out and look for work. He also felt that the AA activities gave him confidence for job interviews. He did not know whether he would continue with his hairdressing plans, although he was considering applying for a college place in the next academic year.

James valued the regular contact with his adviser, and preferred to see the same adviser on each visit to the Connexions office because he had got to know him.

'It's good like, because he tells you what you need to do next, or what's the best option for you, so it's good to keep seeing him ... I probably wouldn't have gone if it wasn't him'.

Model 2 Delivery

The delivery model explored within this case study was AA Model 2, which aimed to re-engage young people entitled to EMA, who had left their college or training place. Model 2 entrants were eligible to join AA, after spending between six and eight weeks NEET. Following notification of 'drop out' by the learning provider, initial contact, assessment and advice was led by mainstream Connexions. If the young person did not secure a positive destination (or a start date for training/college) by week 5 of NEET, and it was no more than eight full weeks since notification of their withdrawal from learning, they were entitled to be referred to AA. While engaged on the AA, young people would receive a financial incentive equivalent to their EMA entitlement, subject to the completion of agreed activities, for a maximum of 20 weeks. Use of the discretionary fund was not permitted until week 13 of the AA.

Context for delivery

Within the pilot area, the AA operated across six local authorities. In August 2008, the rate of employment in the region was 67 per cent, compared to a national average of 75 per cent and that the proportion of worklessness was higher than the national average. The local authority area selected for the case study was considerably more deprived than most others in the pilot area as a whole.

AA delivery across the pilot area was managed by Connexions and overseen by an AA project manager. Across the six local authorities there were slightly different ways of organising AA, due to variations in the size of the local authority and in the size of the NEET cohort. Operational delivery in each local authority was the responsibility of a team manager, who reported directly to the AA project manager. In most local authorities, specialist advisers supported young people on AA, although some local authorities there were 'licensed' PAs whose caseload covered both AA and mainstream young people.

Provision was procured through commissioning managers in each local authority. There was some cross-boundary working to ensure sufficient range and coverage of provision.

Perspective of key stakeholders

Connexions (CXS) staff welcomed the extension of the AA, since it was perceived to be an effective strategy to meet the needs of the NEET group. The bespoke nature of the AA and the existence of dedicated advisers were felt to be the key to its success.

All staff reported that Model 2 had been difficult to implement, which was largely attributed to difficulties in gaining information about drop-outs from colleges and other providers. Information did not arrive in sufficient time to recruit young people onto the model. This was compounded by young people leaving their course, prior to informing the provider, which in turn led to discrepancies in leaving dates and to difficulties interpreting eligibility entitlement. While efforts were made to improve links with local providers to improve information exchange and to encourage referrals, difficulties were still encountered. The information systems used by providers were not sufficiently accurate or responsive to meet the tight timeframe needed to meet AA Model 2 entry requirements.

Advisers also reported that the documentation required to recruit young people to the Model 2 was particularly burdensome for the young person, who needed to prove their leaving date and their entitlement to EMA.

'It's a run-around AA, chasing the young person to let them know that they're eligible anyway, so you're always sort of sprinting if you're working within a timeframe as well. The EMA model was a bit narrow really.'

AA Adviser

Consequently, if the recruitment window was missed or young people struggled with the documentation, they would be advised to wait until they were eligible for Model 1a (13-week NEET intervention model).

'I was worried because, colleges, their record systems, and it was just, slightly different in that often by the time a young person might have been showing signs of disengaging, to them officially being recorded as a leaver. But often the time we got to know about them it was past the window of signing them up [to Model 2], and we would have had to then sign them [up] against Model 1a.'

AA Team Manager

Despite the difficulties of implementing Model 2, earlier intervention was seen as a crucial development within AA delivery. It enabled staff to start helping young people before they became completely disengaged. It was reported that young people who had received earlier intervention were more likely to progress into an EET destination and to do so sooner.

Some **providers** had been involved in the AA since its inception. However, they had little understanding of the changes introduced under Pilot 2. Some providers reported that they had noticed that some young people were a little more engaged and better behaved, which may be a result of young people being recruited via Model 2.

'But as I said, they'd be more educated and they'd be more aware of our provision, so therefore there's certain things like, obviously, the process is the same, regardless of them having had some experience previously, we always do the same process of the training. Obviously, we go through the same spec, but their attitude is slightly different. They'd be more focused, the body language is different and stuff.'

Provider

Providers were highly positive about the AA, seeing it as a 'stepping-stone' for young people which gave them an opportunity to develop themselves; providers also recognised that the AA was filling a gap in provision. All providers that were interviewed, felt capable of responding to the flexible nature of the provision required, and to adapting the activities they offered accordingly.

Young people were generally very positive about their experience of the AA, even if they had not yet achieved a progression into an EET destination. They recognised the role of the AA in helping them to progress. While young people did not have any significant familiarity with the models, those recruited through Model 2 and who were receiving less than the £30 incentive (because of their former rate of EMA) thought this was unfair and that they were being penalised without an apparent reason.

Two different groups were prevalent among the Model 2 young people that were interviewed. The first group had dropped out of learning but recognised this was due to a minor or peripheral factor that did not have a negative impact on their learning in the future. However, their false start often meant they had to wait a year to re-enter learning; the AA was a means to keep active. Learning tasters enabled them to experiment with options and to gain experience in their chosen field. Advisers felt that within this group, young people were often held back a year due to a lack of suitable, flexible learning provision.

The second group of young people had often left college for similar reasons. However, their experiences had left them disengaged and not wishing to return to learning. Instead, young people were very keen to find work and to start earning money. Advisers would support them in their attempts to find employment but would also try to persuade them to consider re-engaging with learning or training. After several weeks of not achieving a job outcome, many young people recognised that learning would help and that it was their best course of action. In some cases, achieving this change in attitude could take many months.

Examples of innovative practice

Sarah was initially unsure what she wanted to do after finishing her GCSEs. She decided to join the 6th form college at her school to undertake a qualification in Health and Social Care and qualified to receive EMA. However, she did not enjoy her post-16 experience as it was too much 'like school'. After leaving her course, she was unsure what to do. A friend who had started the AA told her to contact Connexions to find out about it. She was advised that she was eligible to join under Model 2. She had to provide Connexions with a letter from her old school stipulating when she had left the course.

When Sarah initially started the AA she was focused on finding work. Her initial activities centred on her work goals and included CV development and exploring careers options. During this time, the adviser spoke to her about going to college and the sort of courses she could do, highlighting the benefits of getting a qualification. She had told him she liked drama and applied for courses in drama and performing arts. While in the process of doing this, her adviser encouraged her to ask about a work placement at a local nursery, which she did. This was successful and she undertook work experience while waiting for the result of her college applications.

When the evaluation first interviewed her, Sarah had finished her work placement with the nursery (which she had greatly enjoyed) and she had started at college. She had enrolled on a First Diploma in Performing Arts. This was working out well for her and she was enjoying her learning experience and environment. She acknowledged the importance of her adviser in supporting her decision to go to college.

'I wasn't really too sure about what I wanted to do and then (adviser) put it into my head what I wanted to do, be successful and so on.'

When Sarah was interviewed for the follow-up study, she had completed her qualification, and had applied to do a higher level course in Drama. During the college vacation she had gained paid work at the nursery where she undertook her work placement during the AA. The employer had been so impressed with her work that they had contacted her to see if she might be available to come back temporarily.

Sarah spoke very positively about the AA, indicating that it had helped her identify her interests and to pursue them. It had developed her confidence which enabled her to approach employers and ask for work placements. She felt that AA had helped her 'find her way'.

Sarah thought the adviser role was crucial to her experience, not simply for the practical information about activities but also for giving her support and building her confidence.

Mary was interested in hairdressing when she left school and had the grades to enter an apprenticeship scheme through a local college. She completed a level 1 course and progressed to level 2 but then had difficulties establishing an employer placement. During her level 2 course, she found three salon placements and had to leave all of them through no fault of her own. She received EMA for most of this time, although there was a period of time when she received the full apprenticeship payment of £80 per week. She left her course before she finished her qualification, due to the frustration of not being able to find a work placement that would last.

Connexions contacted her and asked if she wanted help with looking for work. She was attracted to this idea because she had been to the Job Centre and most of the jobs available were for people who were over 18, and she had had no other luck on her own. She also knew Connexions would be able to help her with designing a CV and getting it printed out, ready to distribute to employers.

The majority of the activities Mary took part in within her AA were to support her to find work such as handing out CVs and completing job searches. She attended a job club that helped to improve her confidence. At her AA review meetings, the adviser talked about Mary returning to college. She was sceptical initially because she thought that the money that she would receive for studying, EMA or apprenticeship wages, would not be enough. Despite this she applied for a couple of courses during her AA but was unable to get a place as they were full.

When Mary was first interviewed for the research she was struggling to find a job because of her age and lack of qualifications. Despite this, she was reluctant to start a course because she wanted to earn some money. By the time of the follow-up interview, Mary was still searching for work, mainly in retail, and had returned to NEET after finishing 20 weeks on the AA. She was frustrated by the lack of jobs. She still had thoughts about returning to college and had some idea of the course she would like to do: dressmaking. However, she was still reticent to commit to a long course for financial reasons. She was now over 18 and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance.

Despite the lack of an EET outcome, Mary rated her time on the AA very highly. She thought the adviser was the most important element of the programme. She found the adviser extremely helpful and thought she did everything possible to help. The difficulty surrounded a lack of suitable jobs. She also said the AA boosted her confidence and gave her good interview techniques.

'She was lovely, like, she would look up the job thing for me, print them all out and stuff and set my activity for the next week and stuff. She was useful but there were no jobs she could give me'.

Model 3 Delivery

Delivery model

In this local authority, the focus of study was Model 3 delivery, which was aimed at vulnerable groups. This model allowed young people identified as vulnerable to be fast-tracked onto an AA following six weeks spent NEET. Several categories of vulnerability were defined by the DCSF including Jobseeker's Allowance claimants (who could participate on an agreement only basis), young carers and parents, homeless young people, those supervised by Youth Offending Teams, and young people with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD). In addition, AA staff were able to fast-track a small number of young people through the model who did not fall into one of the categories but who they considered to be particularly vulnerable (10 per cent of the profile set by AA managers).

Context for delivery

The case study was focused on a city-based local authority. The city, and its surrounds, has a population of over 300,000 of which 76 per cent of adults are economically active, compared to 79 per cent nationally. Unemployment is higher, at eight per cent, than the regional (7 per cent), and national averages (5 per cent)¹. The city has relatively high levels of deprivation with 30 per cent of children and young people living in poverty compared to 21 per cent nationally². A higher proportion of young people are inactive following compulsory education in the city than elsewhere, with 13 per cent of 16–18 year olds NEET compared to 7 per cent nationally.

The city is one of five local authorities participating within the AA pilot area. The AA is staffed by a pilot manager and advisers who work in local offices, all initially employed by the Connexions service. The Advisers were, and remain, supported on a day-to-day basis by local operational managers. Throughout the course of the pilot, Advisers have worked solely for the AA, covering the full range of tasks from recruitment to supporting young people through the AA. More recently, the management of the Connexions service has moved under the auspices of the five local authorities. Some transitional difficulties had been experienced. For instance, AA staff were no longer connected via a single email system which had hampered communications. The local operational manager noted how the politics of NEET affected perceptions about the value of the AA within the local authority:

'What AA does is that it takes some of the heat off in terms of reaching targets for NEET and if you can achieve your NEET target, that's helpful to councils, but the councils are more interested in what you are providing universally. The reverse is if they have high NEET and they continue to have high NEET, that's great political lobbying fodder and they can demand extra provision from the likes of Connexions, and squeeze it out, ... but that's the kind of political turmoil that you get by either performing well or not performing well.'

Local Operational Manager

All three of the Pilot 2 AA models operated in case study area. Workloads were organised such that two advisers took responsibility for developing Model 2 (EMA drop out) and the remaining two advisers were responsible for Model 1a & 1b (13 and 20 week NEET) and Model 3 (vulnerable groups). Roles were divided in this way to reflect the additional development work required for Model 2 delivery. As the local manager acknowledged, *'how good you were at networking with other agencies and services determined how good your referrals [were]'*.

¹ Employment and unemployment (Oct 2007–Sep 2008), data downloaded from nomis, June 2009

² Children's Trust: Children's and Young People's Plan 2009-2010, downloaded June 2009

Perspectives of key stakeholders

Advisers valued the ability to work with some young people earlier than would previously have been possible. The majority of young people recruited to Model 3 were young parents, and the second largest group was young offenders. Young people with learning difficulties or disabilities, and other vulnerable groups, were represented to a lesser extent. Advisers felt that many (but not all) young people recruited under Model 3 had complex needs and multiple barriers. Many Model 3 entrants were demanding of advisers' time and their cases, unsurprisingly were difficult to manage:

'They have got you on speed dial and they visit you every day... it seems like almost every time you see them there is something else. One problem has been resolved, but there is another one. And a lot of times it takes so much time to get through all that that you have maybe not got as much opportunity to go straight for training or a job. It would not be realistic for them, you would almost be setting them up to fail.'

AA Adviser

Operational managers agreed with this perspective, although they were concerned that the extent of need could not be readily determined by a young person's classification within a specific vulnerable category. The most vulnerable young people required intensive support, and the AA focused on improving capacity to move forward rather than on solely achieving EET outcomes. This was particularly the case for young parents who needed support with their immediate situation; thinking about education and work was as part of a longer term strategy along with sustained contact with advisers.

'Some of the young mums and dads... outcomes is not what it was really all about. It was working with them to get them to think about [the future]. It was good to get those, because I think that when they are 16 or 17, with babies, it is quite hard for them and they start to drift off. They do not really access Connexions. It is to get hold of them and to give them a financial incentive to come in.'

Local Operational Manager

The **providers** were not aware of the AA model through which young people were recruited. They were confident that if a young person had particular support needs, the adviser would ensure the provider was made aware. The providers had different levels of engagement with the AA, and different backgrounds. One provider had developed a work-based learning taster programme specifically for the AA, as well as a progression route which would deliver Level 2 and 3 qualifications. The driver for their involvement, was their understanding of the needs of young people who cannot achieve entry to, or who drop out of, FE. Another provider had developed their understanding of the needs of young people through involvement in the AA. It had led to a reconfiguration of their basic skills provision to include greater one-to-one support, while maintaining the flexibility of an independent study approach. If providers had a criticism of the AA, it was that they were not given feedback about young people's destinations once they had completed AA.

The **young people** entering the AA through Model 3 had varied success at school in terms of their qualification attainment, and their enjoyment of school was as varied although most had not much liked it. Their route into AA ranged from being homeless or pregnant, having committed an offence or suffering ill-health.

Their activity programmes were highly individualised and focused upon the nature and extent of their barriers. All of the programmes were focused on helping work towards young people's goals in terms of work, learning or training or helping them develop a goal. For those with the most complex barriers, problems such as managing anger needed to be addressed in the first instance, before engagement in activities such as forklift truck training, job search, CV development and distribution, and courses in literacy and numeracy.

The follow-up interviews showed that positive outcomes were achieved by fewer in this group (around one-third). One young person had entered training following the AA. However, due to the FE funding crisis, his provider was planning to close the course before he completed the qualification. A small number of young people had started work, although for one young person, this had lasted only a short time. In contrast, another young person who had left AA and re-entered NEET, although he had since started work and he was enjoying his job. He was also receiving relevant training such as health and safety, first aid, and safe use of equipment.

Among the remaining young people within the sample, although they had re-entered the NEET group, in many cases, the AA had helped them to firm up their future plans and had taken them closer to securing their longer term career goals. Further, most young people reported increased levels of confidence and self-esteem.

The main recommendation made by young people was that the AA should be better marketed, and that awareness of it should be increased. While some young people suggested that the incentive could be raised, the majority thought it was reasonable particularly in light of the opportunities (eg paid for activities) available to them.

Examples of innovative practice

Gill left school early with no qualifications. Following school she completed courses in Health Studies to Level 2 and Beauty to Level 1. Just before she started the AA, she completed a 10-week taster course in sign language and went to a Young Mum's group. It was at the Young Mum's group that she was told about the AA by Connexions staff. She was attracted to the AA by the money that would be available.

On the AA, Gill took the Enterprise Skills Level 1 course which developed key skills. The AA paid for her to undertake a Level 1 in British Sign Language (BSL).

On completion of BSL Level 1, she enquired about progressing to a Level 2 course. However, this course was not available locally. The long travel distance and difficulties with public transport meant that she was unable to progress to this option. Following discussions with her adviser, she decided to enrol on an Access course.

'I was planning on doing my level 2 in sign language but with it only [being available at some distance] I kind of changed my mind, so that's why I wanted to do the access course, to work with children with special needs.'

Gill currently lives at home with her partner and child. A lot of her time is taken up by looking after her young son who has a hearing impairment which involves a lot of hospital and other medical appointments.

Although initially attracted to the AA by the money, it has meant much more to Gill in terms of her improved motivation and the achievement of two qualifications:

'Before I didn't want to do anything and I don't know what courses I would have done if it wasn't for the AA, I wouldn't have done the Enterprise course or the Sign Language course. My experience was quite good, it was quite positive because it wasn't just about the money. It got us into doing things and I actually found I've done two courses whereas if I didn't get on the AA, I wouldn't have done anything.'

The AA also increased her confidence and through it she made new friends. Crucially, the AA enabled her to crystallise her ideas about her future. Gill was very positive about the support she received from her adviser: she liked the regular appointments and the flexibility of the AA.

She suggested that AA could be better advertised since she felt that awareness of it was quite low.

Steven left school with no qualifications. He went on to complete an apprenticeship in construction. He worked as a painter and decorator for a while but he did not like it. When he was interviewed, it was his second time on the AA.

Following his first AA, Steven had found no work or training. He tried to enrol at college for a mechanics course but no places were available. He approached Connexions about rejoining the AA and after about a month, he was allowed to join. He joined through Model 3. As part of his programme, he had received some help with his CV and been encouraged to distribute it to prospective employers. He had also been working on his Maths and English skills.

Steven's main purpose in re-joining the AA was to access training for a door security licence. The AA adviser arranged and paid for the training. He already had obtained a job, subject to gaining a licence. His longer term goal was to own his own security business. He felt that the AA had enabled him to make progress towards this goal.

'Well if it wasn't for the Activity Agreement I wouldn't have been able to do the security training because to do it, it's like £300 odd and I haven't got the money to do it. So that was a big help.'

Steven felt that being on the AA had given him confidence which better enabled him to approach employers about work opportunities, and help him in interview situations. His experience of working with the adviser was very positive:

'She (the adviser) was good because she tries loads of things, tries to get us jobs and stuff. She's trying hard at the minute because of the recession and stuff.'

He would recommend the AA and, apart from increasing the incentive, he could suggest no improvements:

'None of it (needs improving). Well, because like when I first heard about this in Connexions I just thought it was just like another daft course. But when you get on it, it's a lot different because you do a lot more than you think you're going to do. So I enjoyed it.'

Appendix 2 - The Cohort Analysis

The cohort analysis was based on tracking the status of two groups of young people who were NEET. These were termed the 'Treatment Group' which consisted of AA participants, and the 'Control Group' which comprised young people who had rejected the offer of the AA and other young people who were NEET and who, at least on paper, looked as if they would have been eligible for the AA¹.

AA managers were asked to draw the cohort based on all AA joiners in the week of 29 September - 3 October 2008. They were then asked to draw a control group which matched the AA-treatment group, in terms of the AA eligibility criteria, which applied to each delivery model available in the area. A further consideration was to match the treatment and control groups in terms of key characteristics (gender, race and disability). While this, by no means, provided a robust, objective approach to measuring change, the analysis offers *an illustration* of the effect of the AA on young people.

The managers were then asked to track the cohort over time. The first status check was measured on 6 October 2008, and status updates were subsequently collected at four-week interviews until 15 June 2009.

Characteristics of the treatment and control groups

In the week the cohort was drawn, only one young person accepted the offer of a place on Model 2. This adds further weight to the difficulties discussed earlier of operationalising this model. Ten young people from Model 3 were present in the treatment group. The remainder of the group comprised 33 young people from Model 1a and five young people from Model 1b. These same proportions were recorded in the control group.

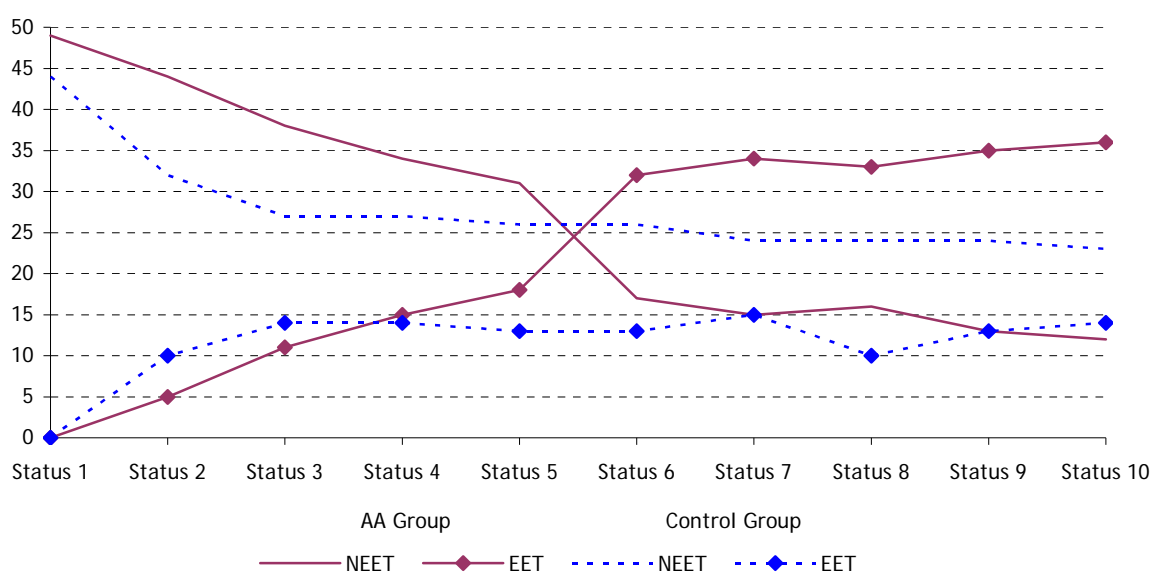
There were 49 young people in each group: the control group consisted of 20 females, 29 males, 15 young people were recorded as having learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD). The majority were White British. The 'treatment' group was matched to this and comprised 13 females, 36 males, seven young people recorded as having LDD, and most were White British.

Trends in the achievement of EET outcomes

It was possible to see a substantial difference over time, in the NEET and EET status between young people who participated in the AA and the control group (see Figure A2.1). The trajectories of the groups are quite different: for young people on the AA there was a dramatic change at status point 5–6; the trend within the control group shows a gradual and less steep decline in NEET over time. This suggests that taking part in the AA does indeed have a positive impact on the young participants.

¹ Note the findings in the MI analysis which show the difficulties of Connexions gaining accurate intelligence on young people's status. When young people were contacted, some AA managers reported around 50 per cent of the group were eligible.

Figure A2.1 - The outcomes of the cohort groups over time



Source: IES 2009

Initially, the status of all young people (the control and treatment groups) was NEET. At the second checkpoint, the EET outcomes for the control group increased, with one-fifth of the group (20 per cent) reporting a positive destination. This rise continued to the next checkpoint, four weeks later, but then the proportion of EET young people in the control group remained fairly static for the next seven status checkpoints.

The proportion of young people who were part of the 'treatment' group and who went on to an EET outcome, showed a steadier increase over the first five checkpoints, from 10 per cent at the second checkpoint, rising to 22 per cent and then 31 per cent at the third and fourth checks. By the time the status of the young people had been checked for a fifth time, (at status point 6), there was a substantial increase in the proportion that had achieved an EET status; and a reversal of the statuses recorded at the fifth checkpoint. At this point, 63 per cent of young people in the 'treatment' group were NEET, and 37 per cent were EET, at the next checkpoint, 35 per cent were NEET and 65 per cent were EET.

The proportion of young people who were NEET in the control group slightly declined, then remained static over time; the proportion in EET fluctuated, while the 'unavailable' group (including illness, parenting/pregnancy and young carers) rose steadily. This meant the decline in NEET in the control group was not solely attributable to young people moving on to positive outcomes. In the treatment group, only one young person was reported as unavailable at the end point for the analysis.

There were more young women moving into EET outcomes in the control group, when compared to the treatment group. Females made up 41 per cent of the control group, and in five of the nine checkpoints, young women formed a higher proportion of the EET group than their proportion in the control group.

Young women in the treatment group appeared less likely to move to an EET status. Young women in this group, made up 27 per cent of the sample; in only three of the nine checkpoints did they make up a higher proportion of the EET group than their counterparts in the treatment group.

Types of EET outcome achieved

Table A2.1 shows the destinations of young people at the final status checkpoint. While 33 per cent of the cohort was reported as NEET, the proportion in the treatment (AA) group was much lower than this average, at 22 per cent. In the control group the proportion NEET was 43 per cent.

The proportion of young people in employment (with and without training) was 12 per cent in the control group and 8 per cent in the treatment group. A key difference between the groups relates to movement into learning and training. Sixty-three per cent of AA participants were in learning or training compared to 10 per cent of the control group. These patterns accord with the Pilot 1 survey findings.

Table A2.1 - Destinations at the final status check

	Control		Treatment		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
NEET seeking employment, education or training	21	43	11	22	32	33
E2E	1	2	17	35	18	18
Inactive	14	29	1	2	15	15
Employment	6	12	4	8	10	10
FE including FLT	3	6	7	14	10	10
Apprenticeships/Work-based learning	1	2	7	14	8	8
NEET - Activity Agreement	1	2	2	4	3	3
NEET - Not ready	2	4	0	-	2	2
N	49		49		98	

Source: IES (2009)

Churn between EET and NEET

Further analysis of the cohort showed that within the control group, 12 young people achieved EET across the course of the status checks but returned to, and stayed, NEET. While for many of these young people, the period of EET was between four and twelve weeks, two had sustained a positive destination for eight of the status checks (approximately 32 weeks; one of these was registered for an E2E course; the other for work-based learning), and another for five of the status checks (approximately 20 weeks; enrolled on E2E provision). Data were not available about whether courses were completed or otherwise. In the treatment group, while 10 young people experienced some churn between EET and NEET, four young people were recorded as EET by the time of the final check. The duration of their earlier EET destinations was similar to that of the control group.

Of the five young people in the treatment group who had achieved an EET outcome but subsequently returned to NEET, three had undertaken an E2E course, another had started a foundation apprenticeship and one had been engaged short term in a personal development opportunity.

There was no clear pattern of activity for those in the treatment group who churned between EET and NEET but who were recorded as EET by the time of the final status check. One had started a job with training, subsequently left the job and later engaged in learning at an FE college. Another young person had started an FE course, which they had left and had re-

entered learning by the final check. Two young people had undertaken personal development opportunities, then returned to NEET, and then one had moved forward into an E2E course while the other young person had started a programme-led Apprenticeship. In both the treatment and control groups, some young people had remained NEET across the course of the status checks. This number comprised eight young people in the treatment group and twelve young people in the control group.

Conclusions

While the analysis can be considered only illustrative due largely to the imperfect method for drawing a control group and the small sample sizes, the trends were suggestive of beneficial outcomes for young people who gained support through the AA.

- At around the 20-week tracking point, there was a dramatic change in the status of young people in the treatment group from NEET to EET (see Figure A2.1). While this point is likely to reflect the typical exit point from the AA, it suggests young people who were NEET and supported through the AA were more likely to achieve EET status and sustain it, compared to the control group. For the control group, while there was an initial decline in NEET at around eight weeks, the trajectory of the group did not change greatly after this point.
- It appeared that young people in the treatment group were more likely to move into higher quality EET outcomes such as learning, work-based learning and apprenticeships and less likely to move into work (see Table A2.1). When this is linked to the analysis in Chapter 4, which showed that the jobs achieved by young people were often quite low quality, a powerful effect of the AA might be inferred.
- Young people on the AA appeared more likely to keep moving forwards, compared to the control group. Fewer young people who had achieved an EET outcome, and then returned to NEET, stayed NEET. In the short term at least, the AA appeared to have built some momentum in terms of moving some young people into positive outcomes.

Appendix 3 - DCSF Framework of activities

At the pilots' inception the DCSF defined a set of activities that could be viewed as a journey from engagement through development to exit. These are shown in Table A3.1. The information gathered from young people, in terms of the core and bespoke coverage, were considered in light of this route map.

Table A3.1 - DCSF Framework of activities

Type of development	Examples
Engagement activities	Introduction; assessment of strengths and areas for development; individualised AA; weekly monitoring; third-party verification (eg of attendance at activities); acknowledgement of achievement; planning next steps; CV development; Forward Action plan.
Development activities	Brokered and funded activities - part-time / bite-sized / other / part of mainstream provision or commissioned for AA. This may include basic skills provision, vocational tasters and personal development. Activities ideally will be accredited (ie lead to a qualification or contribute towards a qualification).
Personal development activities	Aim to develop key skills to raise self-esteem and social / interpersonal skills eg: budgeting skills; citizenship; creative drama / music / media; job clubs; life skills; managing aggressive behaviour; mobility and travel skills; motivational skills / coaching / work with mentor or peers; outward bound challenge; parenting skills; preparation for work courses; sports / coaching activities; summer activity programmes (eg Positive Activities for Young People etc); vocational tasters; youth service programmes; volunteering.
Study skills, including basic skills	Taught classes and hands-on experience - Skills for Life; financial options for education and training benefits; research and investigation projects.
Employability skills	Bite-sized vocational tasters; work experience; preparation for workplace (punctuality, team work, customer service, dealing with tensions, taking instructions, corporate structures, roles and responsibility, problem-solving); short work-related courses; job search skills; interview skills.
Exit activities	Action planning; job and opportunity searching; interview practice; interviews; visits to college or work-based learning providers; personal planning activities.

Source: AA guidance documentation, DCSF

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